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Hogbacks group eager to work with city over issue

The city's pledge to develop a plan to resolve the issue of improper usage of the Hogbacks area was met with enthusiasm and a promise of cooperation by the Skyline Hogbacks Preservation Campaign.

"We are really excited to see the city moving forward with some kind of plan for the area," said Monica McGowan, chair of the committee. "There are many citizens who have much expertise in specific areas who will contribute to the committees."

Although the issue has been on the back burner for years, it finally was moved up to Cañon City Council's list of top five goals for 2008. The emphasis was brought back to the forefront by a group of citizens, who banded together last summer and approached City Council in July 2007. At that time, the group presented a petition with more than 100 signatures of residents who live near the Hogbacks area, "who are directly affected by the growing and uncontrolled use of off-road vehicles near their homes," McGowan said.

"After the July 2 City Council meeting, I left with a positive feeling, a general feeling of encouragement," McGowan said. "I had hopes that council considered this issue a priority, and it should be placed higher on the task list of our city."

McGowan said that meeting left the committee with the feeling the Hogbacks area had been identified as a "bona fide" city issue, as council apparently agreed with citizens' concerns ranging from noisy off-road motor sports to damage to the ecosystem.

"Stories range from noise and frazzled nerves, vibrations that actually rattle windows of homes, the kicking up of dust and unsafe driving, geologic and historical concerns for the area, storm water and erosion problems which our city has to contend with if we have a rainstorm with excessive rain, an unbalanced ecosystem that affects the plants and wildlife of the area," McGowan said.

Trash also has been a problem in the area, with the group finding cans, fast-food bags, mattresses, plastic bottles, clothing and much more. "Name it and it could probably be found," McGowan said.

In addition to the issues listed above, the committee is concerned with the safety of those who use the area.

"It is a tragedy waiting to happen," McGowan said. "It is our duty and obligation to prevent tragedy from happening to one of our local kids. We need to be proactive in a vision for current and future residents. "Members of the Hogbacks Campaign have worked to prepare ideas for

multi-use and controlled usage," McGowan said. "We are very excited to see this issue being addressed."

The city also is ready to dig in.

"The team leaders are now coordinating with their sources," said City Councilman and Committee Chair Keith Hovland. "We will have them at each of the public meetings to relay information and to answer questions." The public meetings have a three-pronged intent: first, to educate the public on the process; second, to seek individuals to sign up for subcommittees; and third, to seek input and discuss ideas.

The first community meeting will begin at 7 p.m. Jan. 31 at City Hall, 128 Main St. The public is encouraged to attend.