

Thrillcraft Culture

Time to ban off-road vehicles from public lands

Right now various National Forests and BLM districts are beginning to put together travel management plans. Most of these plans are focused on corralling the growing abuse of our public lands by thrillcraft – ATVs, dirt bikes, dune buggies, swamp buggies, jet skis, snowmobiles and other associated toys used by neotenuous adults. The underlying assumption of all these travel management plans is that some level of abuse and vandalism of our public domain by thrillcraft owners is inevitable.

I do not accept the premise that abuse of our lands is something that we must tolerate as inevitable. It is our land. It is our children's land and their children's land. We have a responsibility to pass these lands on to the next generation in better condition than we found them. And we have a collective responsibility to protect our national heritage against the thrillcraft menace.

The real problem isn't the machines. It's not even the people. Many otherwise decent people ride thrillcraft, but when they straddle one of these machines they become participants in a dysfunctional culture. It is a culture that sees our public land as nothing more than a giant sandbox. Thrillcraft



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culture represents a lack of respect for other people's property and the quality of their outdoor experience. What people do on their own property is not my concern, but when they ride their machines on public lands, it becomes a societal issue. Our public lands are as close as our society has to shared "sacred" ground.

The operation of any thrillcraft has a disproportional impact upon the landscape, wildlife and other people. Thrillcraft pollute the air and water. They compact soils. They damage wetlands and riparian areas. They spread weeds. They displace wildlife. The noise, speed and general disregard for other people by thrillcraft owners displace other non-motorized users of our public lands. Increasingly they threaten archeological treasures. How can any of this be considered "responsible" use?

You hear a lot about "responsible" off-road vehicle (ORV) use and "a few bad apples" from thrillcraft promoters themselves as well as some government bureaucrats. What is responsible about tearing up the land? It's like suggesting we ought to promote "responsible wife abuse" or "responsible child abuse." There is no level of abuse that is acceptable. Working with agencies to create designated routes or play areas is just helping to legalize public vandalism.

Most people would never allow thrillcraft to run across their lawns. They would not tolerate such noise in their neighborhoods. Would we allow thrillcraft to do wheelies in the Arlington National Cemetery or crawl up the Lincoln Memorial? I think not. And I see no reason to permit similar antics on the rest of our public lands.

To those who think we have to accept thrillcraft because they are "traditional" activities, I remind them that the same arguments were once made about segregation, beating wives, smoking in a public place and many other behaviors and cultural "traditions" that were once commonplace. Society now views these things as wrong and has outlawed them.

There is no right way to do the wrong thing. Running thrillcraft on our public lands is wrong. It's not good for the land. It's not good for the air and water. It's not good for wildlife. It's not good for other people. It's not even good for the people doing it. It's time to ban these machines, not legitimize the continued destruction of our sacred public commons.

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How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NO FREEDOM TO GATHER

Conspicuously missing from last week's (2/14) *EW* list of community meditation offerings was the Dharmalaya Center — not due to reporter oversight, but to the Eugene planning director's draconian application of the city's land use code.

Last May, city staff told Dharmalaya that none of its activities were permissible, including its popular meditation classes and group meditations.

When the staff's position was formally questioned, the planning director eased off on the full closure of Dharmalaya. But her new allowable standard — no more than eight people meeting no more than once a month without special permission — not only keeps Dharmalaya's meditation programs shut down but presents a threat to other meditation instruction and groups in Eugene.

For at least 35 years, Eugene has benefited from small spiritual centers, located in residential areas, offering meditation to the public. These centers have enriched the lives of many, and the community as a whole.

The closure of Dharmalaya's meditation programs was not precipitated by citizen complaint but by aggressive, staff-initiated investigation. Most groups that advertise meditation classes in the *Weekly* could be subject to the same treatment. Without obtaining special city sanction and undertaking costly property alterations, their classes offering access to inner peace may face similar restrictions.

The federal Religious Land Use and Institutional Persons Act prohibits discriminatory and burdensome application of land use laws to limit people's right to participate in group meditation. When the planning director dismissed the relevance of this law to Dharmalaya's meditation programs, concerned community members filed an appeal.

A March 3 appeal hearing (open to the public) will determine whether the city

can proceed with its clampdown on public access to small meditation centers.

Acharya Ravi
Dharmalaya
Eugene

ARROGANT COPS

For far too long those citizens of Eugene who have been abused by Eugene cops have had little or no recourse. The police department's process of internal review of allegations against abusive cops has been nothing but a farce, with Eugene's police chief joining in an arrogant display of self-protection at any cost. Lying and storytelling to protect one another has been all too common. Though the police chief reports to the city manager, who is hired by the City Council, little has been done in the past to address or correct the abuses of Eugene's cops. Perhaps hiring the police auditor can make a difference.

The presence of Eugene's new police auditor, Cris Beamud, an outsider who is not a member of the club, must be a real threat to the police chief and those responsible to him for investigating allegations of abuse against his cops. Though sticking with the facts, being honest and taking corrective action sounds simple, it will require a major shift from the arrogance and bullying that were allowed to become the standard way of doing things.

As long as our police auditor is doing her job, let's hope that the police chief and his cops will take this opportunity to give up tactics of the past and do some self-reflecting about their role and behavior in our community. Protecting the well-being of citizens of Eugene must come first; arrogant behavior and abuse by cops will not be tolerated. Failure to properly investigate or participate in an investigation or lying to protect a fellow cop are grounds for dismissal. And this applies first of all to Eugene's police chief.

Wayne Pierce
Eugene