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NEWS

Commission recommends seasonal closure for Miranda Canyon

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Pam MacArthur examines a fresh stump where someone cut down a live tree in Miranda Canyon.

Cindy Brown/Taos News

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Miranda Canyon will be temporarily closed to motorized vehicles from March 1 to May 1 this year under a short-term plan to help protect the popular recreation area south of Taos.

"The Miranda Commission is still working with the Forest Service on a long-term management plan" for the area, said Pam MacArthur, an equestrian and one of the commissioners.

Miranda Canyon was acquired by the U.S. Forest Service in 2015 and is part of the Camino Real Ranger District. But the agency hasn't set guidelines specifically for how to manage the area, which is popular with horseback riders, hikers, all-terrain vehicles and mountain bikers. The area is so popular it is getting damaged: with trash, erosion from vehicles and graffiti spray-painted on rock outcroppings.

The Miranda Canyon Commission - a group of forest staffers, local residents and livestock owners among others - began meeting to come up with policies for protecting the area's landscape while fostering access for different uses. After hosting several public meetings and tours of the canyon, and collecting 112 responses in a survey, the commission is proposing a seasonal closure to motorized recreational vehicles from Dec. 31 to May 1. Similar seasonal closures occur in other areas of the district adjacent to Miranda Canyon.

If approved by the Forest Service, the canyon would be closed during that time frame to all motorized recreation except snowmobiles. Hiking, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, and mountain biking will still be allowed during the seasonal closure.

"A seasonal closure will help prevent damage to the roads and trails during wet conditions and protect wildlife, water resources and cultural resources," according to a statement from the commission.

The commission decided against a full closure to motorized recreation in light of the survey results.