



Official Newsletter
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The Squeeze on Public Lands: When Access Restrictions Come Full Circle by Frank Whiston

If you've been following outdoor recreation in New Mexico long enough, you get used to seeing public land access chipped away bit by bit.

For decades, the motorized community—four-wheelers, dirt bikers, and OHV enthusiasts—has been on the front lines of this fight. Time and again, motorized recreationists have been told that closures, restricted routes, and shrinking access footprints were necessary sacrifices due to management challenges or federal budget shortfalls.

A recent [story broken by the New Mexico Wildlife Federation \(NMWF\)](#) shows that the tide of land management changes doesn't stop with motorized users. Now, non-motorized groups are facing a remarkably familiar challenge.

The Sandia Mountain Land Transfer

According to the report, the Pueblo of Sandia is pushing to transfer nearly 10,000 acres of U.S. Forest Service land on the west side of the Sandia Mountains into federal trust status, absorbing it into the reservation. State officials—including Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham and Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard—have already signaled support, citing Forest Service budget cuts, littering, and a lack of enforcement as key reasons for the shift.



While tribal leadership maintains that established trails and public hunting through game draw programs would be preserved, outdoor organizations like NMWF are raising serious concerns. The 2003 *T'uf Shur Bien Preservation Trust Area Act* was specifically passed by Congress to resolve land claims in perpetuity, protecting the area as public federal land open to all Americans.

Transferring the land out of Forest Service jurisdiction removes guarantees of public access. As NMWF Executive Director Jesse Deubel pointed out, if restrictions are placed on walking off established trails, non-motorized users—hunters, rock climbers, birdwatchers, and backcountry hikers—will suddenly find their freedoms curtailed.

The Post-2005 Playbook: Facing the Same Restrictions

For motorized users, this entire setup feels eerily familiar.

Ever since the Forest Service implemented the **2005 Travel Management Rule (TMR)**, the motorized community has lived under a strict administrative framework: **everything is closed unless explicitly designated open**. Before 2005, cross-country travel, dispersed camping, and exploring off main lines were normal parts of motorized land use. Once TMR took hold, motorized users were confined strictly to designated lines on a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM).

The rationale back then was always the same: *The Forest Service lacks the budget to manage open access, so we must restrict movement to official corridors to protect the land*. Now, wilderness advocates and non-motorized users find themselves facing that exact same playbook:

- **The Loss of Cross-Country Freedom:** If foot traffic in the Sandias is restricted strictly to designated, established trails, quiet recreationists will effectively face their own "cross-country ban." Hunters packing out game off-piste, climbers navigating to unestablished crags, and backcountry hikers looking for solitude will face the same off-trail restrictions motorized users have navigated for two decades.
- **Punishing the Majority for Agency Budget Cuts:** State and tribal officials are arguing that because the Forest Service is underfunded and can't control litter or vandalism, the solution is to remove the land from the public trust. Motorized users know this frustration well—watching access stripped away not because public land belonged less to the public, but because managing agencies claimed they lacked the capacity to police it.

Now that the shoe is on the other foot, wilderness proponents are discovering just how uncomfortably it fits.

Why Shared Access Requires a United Front

For a long time, a quiet divide existed in the outdoor community. When OHV routes were shuttered, traditional wilderness proponents rarely saw it as a threat to their own activities. But the situation in the Sandias proves a fundamental truth about land management:

Access restrictions rarely stop at a single user group.

Once a precedent is established that federal land can be transferred away or restricted because an agency is overstretched, every recreational group becomes vulnerable.

Whether you ride on two wheels, four wheels, or lace up hiking boots, once public land status is surrendered, regaining those access rights is almost impossible.

Moving forward, the takeaway shouldn't be about pointing fingers over past debates—it's about recognizing our shared stake in public land.

1. **Underfunding is not a reason to surrender public land:** The solution to an overstretched Forest Service is better funding, stronger community stewardship, and dedicated law enforcement—not handing over public domain.

2. **Access defense must be universal:** Motorized users, hunters, anglers, hikers, and climbers have historically fought separate battles. But when the fundamental status of public land is on the line, our interests are identical.

It is vital that everyone who visits the Sandias practices Leave No Trace, respects cultural sites, and treats the mountain with care. But as legislation moves forward, all recreationists need to stand together and insist that public lands remain in public hands—and open for public use.



Why Modern Off-Road Apps Are Losing the Ground Truth by Frank Whiston

There is a distinct difference between truly knowing a trail and merely following a glowing blue line on a dashboard screen. For decades, navigating the rugged, volcanic terrain of New Mexico required an appreciation for raw geography. It meant cross-referencing faded USGS topographic quads, parsing black-and-white Forest Service Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUMs), and listening to the collective memory of the local four-wheel-drive community. You didn't just know where a trail went; you understood its behavior, its history, its seasonal washouts, and its vocabulary. Today, the backcountry has been digitized. A multi-million-dollar industry of 4WD navigation apps promises to put "expert-curated" trail data into the palms of our hands with the click of a subscription button. Platforms like these aggressively market a plug-and-play version of navigating, complete with clean user interfaces, standardized 1-to-10 difficulty ratings, and flashy trail descriptions written by a network of regional "scouts."

RELIANCE ON CORPORATE DATA

Slick apps. Standardized ratings. Big marketing budgets.
Not a substitute for generations of local knowledge.

PREMIUM SUBSCRIPTION
\$ IN-APP UPGRADES
MARKETING FIRST

HELL'S REVENGE
Moab, UT
★★★★★
MODERATE

GOLD MINE TRAIL
Big Bear, CA
★★★★★
HARD

ELEPHANT HILL
Johnson Valley, CA
★★★★★
EXTREME

Difficult Trail
4/10 Rating

Map Layers Offline Maps My Content Tools

DATA DRIVEN

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE REAL EXPERIENCE

• Water Crossing
• Washouts
• Seasonal Access
• Trail Changes
• Local Landowners
• History

KNOW THE LAND RESPECT THE LAND

MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR APPS. SLICK INTERFACES. BUILT FOR PROFIT.

EARNED OVER DECADES. ROOTED IN THE LAND. PASSED DOWN, NOT DOWNLOADED.

Yet, for those who have spent a lifetime exploring these dirt roads, scratching paint on local brush, and crawling over native rock right here in New Mexico, the glossy veneer of these apps is remarkably easy to pick apart. In the rush to monetize and segment our public lands into marketable digital assets, these platforms are exposing a widening rift between Silicon Valley marketing and the actual ground truth. From topographically impossible trail names to sanitized local histories, the data we are being asked to pay for is frequently falling short of the very land it claims to map.

Naming a trail is an act of historical and geographic preservation. On public land, those names are tied to decades of local heritage, ranching history, or official geological surveys. Yet, as commercial navigation apps rush to package the backcountry into easily searchable assets, they frequently fall into the trap of inventing titles or naming entire geographic routes after a single standalone feature.

Take the Caja del Rio plateau west of Santa Fe. In its database, a leading off-road navigation app features a technical track confidently labeled as the "Ortiz Mountain Pass." To an outsider or an unseasoned wheeler relying solely on the screen, the word "Pass" implies a navigable corridor through a drainage divide—a way across the mountain. But the ground truth tells a different story.

The route doesn't cross a ridgeline or drop into an adjacent valley; it climbs up the volcanic terrain and dead-ends at a scenic ridge. It is topographically an out-and-back spur or an overlook, not a pass. Labeling it as such is a geographic misnomer that risks misleading drivers into expecting a through-route gap. Additionally, our club has a decades long history of travelling this route as a loop known as Sagebrush Flats.

This digital rewrite of our trails isn't isolated to topographical errors; it frequently misrepresents how trails are identified by the people who actually maintain them. In the Johnson (Gordy's) OHV Area, an entire trail route was initially cataloged by a popular subscription database under the name of a specific, well-known obstacle rather than the actual trail itself. To a transient app user or an out-of-state scout, naming a trail after its most dramatic rock feature makes sense for clicks and search engine optimization. But to the local community, it erases the broader context of the trail system.

The fix didn't come from an algorithm or a corporate GIS analyst in an out-of-state office. It came from the local community asserting ownership over its land. When the New Mexico 4 Wheelers (NM4W) stepped up to install physical, on-the-ground trail signs, the disconnect became impossible to ignore. Recognizing the conflict between their digital writeup and the physical reality, the mapping platform worked alongside NM4W to ensure their database correctly integrated the true "Lower Amado" trail name to match the signage.

This collaboration underscores the vital core of off-road navigation: digital curation can never truly replace local stewardship. An app can aggregate public data and send scouts out to take photos and write short summaries, but the true authority remains with the local clubs who know the land, maintain the routes, and physically hammer the signs into the dirt.

The marketing engine behind all-in-one off-road apps heavily pushes the myth of the "one-stop shop"—the promise that a single subscription can provide the ultimate, definitive authority on where you can and cannot drive. But veterans of the backcountry know that in the world of public lands navigation, a commercial database is never the law of the land.

When you are traveling through a National Forest, the only map that legally matters is the primary source Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). It is the official enforcement tool used by land managers and Law Enforcement Officers to dictate seasonal closures, vehicle width restrictions, and route legality.

While mainstream off-road apps stream these boundaries as dynamic vector layers, they are aggregating and translating public data in a corporate office. If an algorithm fails to render an update, or a regional scout misreads a boundary line, the subscriber on the ground is the one left holding a citation. True backcountry situational awareness means bypassing the corporate middleman and pulling data directly from the source. There is a profound philosophical divide in modern navigation platforms regarding how this is handled.

On one side is the *Curated Guide* approach, epitomized by popular subscription-based curated platforms. These apps cater to a demographic looking for an easy, passive navigation experience. They tell you exactly where to turn, what to look at, and how difficult a trail will be based on generalized ratings. But by wrapping the terrain in a simplified consumer wrapper, they encourage drivers to outsource their critical thinking to the screen.

On the other side is the *Traditional Atlas* approach, which is why platforms like this remain indispensable to long-time wheelers. The atlas-style platform doesn't pretend to hold your hand or provide a curated "experience." Instead, it operates as a sophisticated GIS light engine, allowing users to import, stack, and cross-reference primary source documents.

For an experienced navigator, the value of a platform isn't found in a catalog of pre-packaged "Featured Trails." It is found in the ability to layer raw USGS topographic maps with current, unedited PDF or GeoTIFF map sheets directly from the Forest Service and BLM. More importantly, it honors a lifetime of local exploration. Rather than relying on crowdsourced data compiled for corporate profit, an atlas-style platform serves as a digital vault for a driver's own historical footprint—housing countless personally recorded tracks, verified club waypoints, and the exact ground truth that commercial guides are still struggling to capture.

DON'T FOLLOW THE CROWD BLINDLY.
OVER-RELIANCE ON CENTRALIZED, SUBSCRIPTION-GATED TRAIL DATABASES CAN HARM OUR TRAILS AND OUR FUTURE.

⚠ THE HONEY POT EFFECT
Popular trails get flooded.
Resources get damaged.
Closures become more likely.

⊗ THE ERASURE EFFECT
Less-traveled routes disappear.
Local knowledge gets lost.
Future access is put at risk.

! CENTRALIZED DATA CONTROL = RISK TO OUR ACCESS

REJECT PASSIVITY. PROTECT OUR FREEDOM TO EXPLORE.

SUPPORT LOCAL CLUBS
Local clubs build trails, share knowledge, and stand up for access.
GET INVOLVED. MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

CROSS-REFERENCE WITH PRIMARY SOURCES
Use MVUMs, BLM maps, and official resources.
DON'T OUTSOURCE YOUR RESPONSIBILITY.

KEEP THE SKILLS ALIVE
Map reading. Route planning. Terrain awareness. These skills are freedom.
TEACH THEM. PASS THEM ON.

BE STEWARDS. THINK LONG TERM.
Our choices today shape public land access tomorrow.
RESPECT THE LAND. PROTECT THE FUTURE.

DON'T JUST DOWNLOAD. GET INVOLVED.
KNOW THE LAND. RESPECT THE LAND. KEEP IT OPEN.

4WD COMMUNITY
UNITED FOR ACCESS
TODAY & TOMORROW

The convenience of modern off-road navigation apps is undeniable, but we must look closely at what we sacrifice when we let out-of-state corporate algorithms dictate where we explore. When an entire community stops reading the actual land and instead surrenders its curiosity to a slickly marketed digital interface, the consequences extend far beyond a few misspelled trail names or geographic misnomers. We risk fundamentally altering public land access.

Consider the compounding threats of a centralized, corporate-managed trail database. By steering users exclusively toward a limited menu of "Featured Trails," these platforms create a destructive "honey pot" effect. Hundreds of casual drivers are channeled onto the exact same corridors, overwhelming local infrastructure, accelerating trail erosion, and irritating land managers. The inevitable result of this localized over-saturation isn't a better off-road experience—it is a gate with a padlock on it.

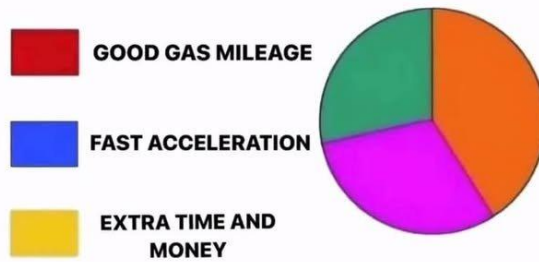
Conversely, the trails left unselected by corporate mappers face an even quieter, more insidious death. When a track is left off a commercial app's user interface, it effectively ceases to exist for the modern consumer. But public land management operates on a strict principle of "use it or lose it." When the Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management revises its travel management plans, roads that show no documented public utility are the very first targets to be permanently erased from the next MVUM cycle. By letting a tech company decide which trails are worth archiving, we are passively allowing them to determine which trails we are willing to lose.

For their part, the commercial platforms behind modern off-road navigation apps must continue to mature and fundamentally change how they gather and verify their data. Rather than outsourcing trail documentation to transient, social-media-focused "scouts" looking for digital perks and Elite-level profile badges, these companies must actively engage with the long-time, established local clubs. These are the groups that have spent decades doing the heavy lifting—not only performing the physical trail maintenance, trash cleanups, and stewardship projects on the ground, but tirelessly engaging with public land management agencies to advocate for, negotiate, and defend motorized recreation access. Securing public land access is not built on a single weekend trail run; it is the result of local clubs spending decades building trust with land managers, participating in endless public comment windows, analyzing complex travel management plans, and ensuring our historic routes remain legally open. Partnering directly with these local pillars, rather than relying on superficial crowdsourcing networks, is the only way for tech companies to tap into true, reliable ground truth.

A much more beneficial, long-term solution would be for these platforms to establish structured grant programs. By offering financial grants to further a local club's public land and recreational advocacy, tech companies can build mutually beneficial relationships. In exchange for this support, clubs can provide verified, topographically accurate on-the-ground information that keeps app databases pristine. Moving away from the superficial "gamification" of public lands and investing directly in the local volunteers who physically protect access is the only way to ensure both trail ecosystems and digital mapping platforms survive.

True land stewardship cannot be bought for a \$30-\$60 annual subscription, nor can it be outsourced to regional "scouts" looking for digital perks. It requires an active, legally literate, and physically present community. If we want to preserve our heritage on these dirt roads, the next generation of four-wheelers must reject the passivity of the plug-and-play era. We must continue to support local clubs like the New Mexico 4 Wheelers, cross-reference our routes with primary government sources, and physically hammer our own signs into the dirt. The ground truth doesn't live on a dashboard screen—it belongs to the people who know the history of the land, respect its legal boundaries, and possess the skills to navigate it on their own terms.

PERKS OF HAVING A JEEP



Meeting Minutes – July 18,2026 by Jack Dickey for Sec Shirley Godfrey

The July meeting was hosted by Beth and Frank Whiston at their far-northeast heights home in Albuquerque. Members provided a variety of pot luck dishes resulting in a great meal. Dinner was served around 5:00 PM. President Jack Dickey called the business meeting to order at 6:09 PM.

Members Attending: Steve Allen, Amy Allen, Bruce Allen, Jeff Atchison, Tracy Bakewell, Cheryle Bakewell, JP Bowdoin, Susan Bowdoin, Rob Campbell, April Campbell, Mike Crosby, Janet Crosby, Shay Daves, Jack Dickey, Cathy Dickey, Doug Elkins, Preston Garner, Melissa Garner, Robert Gill, Karen Gill, Ed Kausche, Lyn Kausche, Dale Leschnitzer, Allison Martinez, Cliff Meier, Jeanne Meier, Jack Nutter, Don Owen, Karen Owen, Laura Perlichek, Snow Petersen, Matthew Ray, Lauri Rector, Travis Rendell, Jonathan Rivera, Don Roy, Chris Sears, Amy Silver, Richard Steele, Josh Tucker, Mary Turpin, Anthony Weaver, Frank Whiston, Beth Whiston, Rebecca Whiston, Mandy Witt

Guests Attending: Lora Baca, Jeremy Baca, Michael Billhymer, Alaska Harston, Lisa Jackson, Pamela Moore, John Servatt, Julia Servatt

PRESIDENT'S REPOST – Jack Dickey

Jack thanked Beth and Frank Whiston for hosting the meeting. Jack Dickey recognized two new trip leaders and presented them NM4W trip leader medallions: Josh Tucker and Lauri Rector. Lauri, a veteran trip leader from years past, recently led a trip after a hiatus of many years. Jack led a quick discussion about GMRS radio etiquette; reminding users to not use inappropriate language while talking on the radio.

VICE PRESIDENT'S MEMBERSHIP REPORT – Jonathan Rivera

Five new memberships were voted on by members present. A motion was made and seconded to approve Robert and Karen Gill, Dale Leschnitzer, Mandy Witt, Preston and Melissa Garner, and Shay Daves as voting (full) members. The motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion.

There were multiple fines levied for transgression on local trips as well as the Rubicon Trail trip.

SECRETARY'S REPORT – Jack Dickey for Shirley Godfrey: A motion was made and seconded to approve the June meeting minutes as published in the July newsletter. Motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Richard Steele: Rich provided current balances of both checking and saving accounts. A motion was made and seconded to approve the treasurers report. Motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion.

Rich noted that the NMOHVA dues in the amount of \$100.00 for the next twelve months was paid. He also reminded members that dues payment season is now open.

A motion was made and seconded to approve a prior expense of \$430.92 to upgrade the website storage to 250 GB for three years, the remaining term of our current agreement (2028) with the webhosting company.

Motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion.

TRIP REPORT – Mary Turpin

Past Events and Trips (10 since last meeting)

- June 19 – 25, Cripple Creek CO, David Ham
- June 20 – Jemez Exploratory, Josh Tucker
- June 21 – 26, Overlanding the Rubicon, Mary Turpin
- June 27, Journey to the Jemez from Mt. Taylor, Snow Peterson
- June 28, Jemez Mystery Route, Jonathan Rivera
- July 2 – 5, Snow's Enigma - 4th of July, Overland Edition, Cuba to Jemez, Snow Peterson
- July 6 – 8, Yansing/Iron Chest/Holy Cross, CO, Mary Turpin
- July 11 - Rigs and Coffee, Plata Coffee, Mary Turpin
- July 11 - Pecos Overlanding Exploratory, Josh Tucker

DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS REPORT – Bill Zobel: no report. Jack Dickey noted that President Trump recently signed executive orders reducing the size of both Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears National monuments. There is a lot of misinformation in media about the changes. BlueRibbon Coalition probably has the most reliable information.

PROGRAM REPORT – Cathy Dickey: The store was open for business. Cathy provided Rich Steele with current proceeds from the store. Cathy reminded members the ASI Customs in Albuquerque will print one-off clothing items with the club logo.

HISTORIAN REPORT – Frank Whiston: Frank had nothing to report. Regarding uploading photographs to the gallery, Don Roy asked members to:

- Please add captions to gallery photographs
- Use quality over quantity for gallery photographs
- Don't upload duplicate photographs – yours or another member's

WEBMASTER & NEWSLETTER EDITOR REPORT – Don Roy: Don mentioned that there was a bug in the tool that adds the club calendar to members personal calendars. He looked into it and the calendar tool is now functioning properly.

OLD BUSINESS

Election of Officers for FY26-27

Jack Dickey called for any further nominations for officer positions. There being none, a motion was made and seconded to close nominations. Motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion.

As there was only one person nominated for each officer position; a motion was made and seconded to elect the slate of officers by acclamation. Motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion.

The following members were elected as the FY26-27 officers:

- President - Mary Turpin
- Vice President - Jonathan Rivera
- Secretary – Lauri Rector
- Treasurer – Rich Steele
- Trip Chair – JP Bowdoin
- Program Chair – Cathy Dickey
- Historian – Frank Whiston
- Director of Environmental Affairs – Jack Dickey

Discussion and voting on proposed changes to SOP

Jack Dickey led a short discussion about several changes to the NM4W SOP supplement to the bylaws. Proposed changes had been posted on the NM4W website since May. A motion was made and seconded to approve changes to the NM4W SOP supplement to the bylaws. Motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion. The following changes were approved:

- Consistent formatting throughout document
- Clarifying award of Participant Points for members leading multiple groups or multi-days
- Clarifying award of Participant Points for members that help out on trips
- Clarifying award of Trip Leader points
- Increasing Trip Leader dues discount award to 30%
- Changing month for presentation of treasurer's annual financial report to August
- Removing restriction on members receiving financial gain from membership in the corporation
- Addition of Article XI. Intellectual property and merchandising

Jack Dickey and Don Roy agreed to update SOP document and post it on the website.

The following items were tabled: - Proposal from Chalmers Ford to conduct 4x4 driver training for new owners, committee report on adding FR 24NAA (Tank Trap) to Santa Fe NF MVUM, and general and management liability insurance.

NEW BUSINESS

Rich Steele asked that members present recognize outgoing officers Shiley Godfrey, Secretary and Jack Dickey, President for their many dedicated years of service.

50/50 Raffle – winner Robert and Karen Gill

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn. Motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 7:40 PM.



Officers and Staff

President Mary Turpin pres@nm4w.org	Vice-President Membership Chair Jonathan Rivera vpres@nm4w.org	Secretary Lauri Rector sec@nm4w.org
Treasurer Rich Steele treas@nm4w.org	Program Chair Cathy Dickey prog@nm4w.org	Historian Frank Whiston hist@nm4w.org
Trip Chair JP Bowdoin trips@nm4w.org	Environmental Affairs Jack Dickey envdir@nm4w.org	Membership Info Shirley Godfrey info@nm4w.org
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