

They Sue, But What Do they Do? By Carla Boucher, Attorney

Four wheel drive enthusiasts have a long history of demonstrating their commitment to the environment. This commitment extends to conservation projects not just to protect our recreation roads and trails, but to places where we can NOT recreate because the area is closed to 4x4 recreation or motorized recreation as a whole.

In the past the UFWDA *Voice* has featured many of these conservation efforts by four wheel drive clubs and associations. Our community can proudly boast that it has contributed tens of thousands of volunteer hours year after year in an effort to conserve the environment and the plants and animals we share it with.

Our community of four wheelers has faced an ever-growing image problem perpetuated by negative publicity, pictures reproduced out of context, and admittedly by a few rogue enthusiasts who refuse to adopt responsible use ethics or worse, flagrantly break the law. When these enthusiasts chose to drive under the influence of alcohol, tear up the environment, disregard state motor vehicle laws, or trespass they hurt the rest of us, undeserving as that is for us. The adopted policy of UFWDA and its members is to distance ourselves from criminals - period. When enthusiasts break the law, thereby refusing to conduct themselves according to our expected code of conduct they can not be a part of us. UFWDA has supported tough law enforcement legislation, advocated for more law enforcement personnel at local, state, and federal levels, and initiated and nurtured a robust system of trail patrol volunteers. As the old saying goes, if you're not with us, you're against us.

I bring up this point about our position on responsible recreation and our dedication to environmental responsibility because it occurred to me that while we are out-spent in litigation by our environmentalist counterparts we are NOT outdone in caring for the very environment those other groups profess to love and protect. It just doesn't make sense that the four wheeling community is accused of environmental degradation, usually based solely on our existence, yet the environmental community generally appears to have moved exclusively toward litigation and away from conservation. They sue, but what do they "do" to save the environment? What do the members of some of the largest environmental organizations do on-the-ground that demonstrates their commitment to conservation?

Until now I operated under the dillusion that environmental activists spent at least some time actually being outdoors, laboring on-the-ground to save habitat. I was limited by own myopic experience. As a four wheel drive user and through my leadership position with UFWDA I thought every activist's experience was similar to mine – having fun out of doors and being involved in work projects out of doors in my down time. Dirt on my hands from the soil I've cared for is a badge of honor, just one desired side effect of hard-earned respect. But when I went looking to see what environmental activist actually do outdoors I couldn't find much.

The Sierra Club website asks its activist to "save the polar bear" by sending a message to Congress and to "protect Appalachia's mountains and streams from destruction" by contacting Congress. Its "get outdoors" link seems a likely place to find work initiatives but instead amount to pretty much just a vacation advertisement for "mountain adventures" and "walks along wilderness coastlines". I was impressed to find one work project - "brush and deadwood removal to improve the

health of the forest surrounding the Sierra Club's Clair Tappaan and Hutchinson lodges". The price, in addition to your donation of hard work is \$545 for adults. I guess you have to start your field work somewhere and as Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz said, "there's no place like home". www.sierraclub.org

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is "the nation's most effective environmental action group, combining the grassroots power of 1.2 million members and online activists with the courtroom clout and expertise of more than 350 lawyers, scientists and other professionals". Through their guidance people can "save wildlands across America". How? By "taking a hike through some vulnerable landscapes" or by being a part of the "7 million messages sent to corporations and government officials". I tried to have faith that NRDC activism meant more than pushing papers and thought my efforts were rewarded when I linked to their "Wilderness preservation" page. But alas, the menu wasn't titled wilderness restoration. But I did find all the alarmist reading I'd care to see about "global warming, invasive development", and the "controversy over opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling". www.nrdc.org

The Wildlands Center for Preventing Roads (Wildlands CPR) mission is to revive and protect wild places by promoting watershed restoration through road removal, preventing new road construction, and stopping off-road vehicle abuse. A look through their website looks more like their mission is to stop off-road vehicle USE, not just abuse. If you spend time looking through their website you'll be hard pressed to find any information about what they DO, on-the-ground, for watershed restoration. Their "what we do" link includes workshops to train activists and agency employees; giving presentations and raising money; litigation, development of a bibliographic database, and responses to information requests. Their "campaigns" link indicates they work to build activist communities, work for legislative reform, and raise funds. You might think they provide an outlet for meaningful on-the-ground restoration work through several of their campaigns but what you find in the words on their website is that they work on developing restoration principles and raise funds for restoration. No where is there evidence they do anything toward reviving wild places except litigation and legislation. www.wildlandscpr.org

I could go on, but I won't. To do so would just seem childish when you clearly get the point. I am proud of the conservation ethic that our membership has! Whatever clout UFWDA carries with it in our endeavors to protect, promote, and provide 4x4 opportunities worldwide comes as a result of our members' dedication to responsible recreation, love of the outdoors, and exemplary stewardship of the lands that bring us so much enjoyment and pleasure. Thank you in advance for your continued dedication to environmental sustainability. If you need assistance in coordinating a clean-up day or restoration project, outside, on-the-ground, out in nature and not from behind a computer, please check out our website. There you will find information to aide you with whatever project suits you or your four wheel drive club. The first weekend in October is set aside each year for UFWDA four wheel drive communities across the globe to engage in a community service project. Send us a link to your website or send us your story when you're done.