

4-wheelers tear up USFS land in Tahoe City, South Lake

By Kathryn Reed

Ruts from illegal 4-wheel drive activity are marring U.S. Forest Service land throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin. In Tahoe City, what was a meadow with strands of green grass covering it now looks like a crime scene. And it is.

A price tag has not been put on the damage. The most serious incident this month occurred in Tahoe City, with the other in South Lake Tahoe.



A Tahoe City meadow has been ruined by illegal 4-wheel activity.

Photos/USFS

Law enforcement is looking for the suspects in the North Shore case, while the three male 17-year-olds from Stateline who were caught on the South Shore were given a lecture. If they are caught doing it again, such leniency is not likely to be granted.

None of the violators was in a place that allows 4 wheeling even when it's dry.

“Cross country is not allowed at all. They were in places that vehicles are never allowed,” USFS spokeswoman Cheva Heck said of the violators.

The meadow in Tahoe City has ruts at least 6 inches deep and several inches wide from some big tires. Tire marks show the violators were spinning doughnuts.

With the designated off-road trails super wet this year, some won't open for a while. The Forest Service's website lists projected opening dates for the trails. But with the National Weather Service issuing a flood advisory through 9pm June 24 for creeks, streams and rivers near South Lake Tahoe, Tahoe City, Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, the dirt roads in the basin are going to be wet for quite a while.



Tire ruts will become hard and "permanent" as the water recedes.

“We are concerned for people's safety and protection of resources of soil and plant habitat,” Heck told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Massive ruts, especially like the ones left in Tahoe City, stay that way until crews restore the land. This degradation leads to erosion problems.

The culprits on the North Shore accessed the area from road

No. 73 off Fairway Avenue. Witnesses told authorities they saw a newer, blue pickup out there.

Penalties could be a maximum of six months in jail and/or a \$5,000 fine. If caught and found guilty, the suspects would likely have to pay the Forest Service to restore the meadow to the pre-damage condition. This is never an inexpensive task. If they aren't found, it's taxpayer dollars that will restore the meadow.

On top of the damage to the meadow, the suspects left a smoldering campfire behind. The fire was reported June 13 and was most likely started the weekend of June 11-12, Heck said.

Anyone with information is asked to call (775) 831.0911. Anonymity will be granted and a reward may be offered.

The Forest Service was alerted to the South Lake Tahoe incident when someone reported the 4-wheeling to police, who then called the USFS.



Damage just
outside Van
Sickle Bi-
State Park in
South Lake
Tahoe.

This area behind the now demolished Colony Inn Hotel is loosely called Chonokis Meadow. It requires crossing California Tahoe Conservancy land to get to the USFS owned meadow. CTC doesn't allow motorized vehicles on its land – and

the Forest Service doesn't allow driving through meadows.

"(There was) no gate or signage there that says 'road closed' or anything of that sort. Since the damage, the USFS has put in Carsonite posts indicating that vehicles are prohibited," Heck said.

The boys who were caught in the act had a Jeep and 4-wheel truck.

"They were very cooperative when officers spoke with them. Their impression was (the boys) didn't realize what they were doing. They were really compliant and concerned," Heck said.

The soil there was spongy and the damage is nowhere near as horrendous as how the culprits violated the meadow on the North Shore.