

Death Valley road to stay closed to the public

By Louis Sahagun, Los Angeles Times

Inyo County has lost a six-year legal battle for control of "Last Chance Road," an alleged public highway that starts in a desert wash and peters out at several spots halfway up a small hill on Death Valley National Park's northern edge.

The county had sought to open the road for public use, but environmentalists had fought to keep it closed.

"This is a great ruling for Death Valley National Park and the wildlife that calls it home," said Ted Zukoski, an attorney with Earthjustice. "It means that an alleged road through federal wilderness will remain closed to vehicles."

U.S. District Court Judge Anthony W. Ishii ruled Wednesday that the county failed to prove the half-mile sliver of wilderness terrain was established under a Civil War-era right-of-way law known as R.S. 2477.

Although the law was repealed more than four decades ago, routes established before then were allowed under a grandfather clause.

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