

Motorized vehicles damaging USFS land

By Kathryn Reed

Saying you didn't know the rules isn't good enough.

"They don't understand it takes time and effort to rehabilitate the damage and it is taxpayer dollars that go toward that," Frank Machler with the U.S. Forest Service said.

He's talking about damage to forestland by motor vehicles.

Machler is a law enforcement officer in the Lake Tahoe Basin. He spent part of last weekend investigating damage done by motorcyclists near Griff Creek above Kings Beach.

It's not severely rutted, but it is noticeable and undeniably a violation of the motorize vehicle regulations. Proving resource damage is more difficult, Machler said. For example, driving over alders actually helps them to propagate.

"We do get lot of motor vehicle violations, but rarely do we see bad resource damage in the basin," Machler told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Motorcycles are allowed on 250 miles of roads in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Photo/LTN file

Even though there may not be signs in a given area saying motorized vehicles are not allowed, it is up to the user to know the rules of the land they are riding on.

The culprits in the Kings Beach incident have not been caught. If an LEO catches someone riding where they aren't supposed to, at a minimum a \$150 citation can be issued. If it goes to court, a judge has the authority to issue a fine up to \$5,000 and six months in jail.

"The court has said recreation users need to know the rules of the land they are traveling on," Machler said. "I'm not sure people are taking the time to find out who owns the property they are recreating on and what the rules are. People are not taking the time to read the signs that are in place. They walk past bulletin boards."

To catch more of the scofflaws takes the public's help because the number of LEOs and rangers in the woods is finite. Machler said there are ways to protect reporting parties.

One good thing about a more normal winter this year is people were not able to violate the motorized rules as blatantly as

they did in drier years. Snow prevented a person from driving around the gates – which was happening in the last few years.

The basin has 250 miles of roads where motorized vehicles may travel. This is a small number compared to some forests, but the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is also on the small side.

The USFS provides free motor vehicle use maps at its offices as well as online.