

Mountain Democrat



Fees stop cycle races in forest

By Chris Daley | Democrat staff writer | August 01, 2010 11:55

Changing bikes in midstream might describe what the U.S. Forest Service is doing to the Polka Dots Motorcycle Club. So says a prepared statement from the 55-year-old group based in Sacramento. The Forest Service has notified Polka Dots that the permit for its annual Family and Enduro rides through the Eldorado National Forest may now cost up to \$10,000 per year for the next five years - and must be paid in advance.

“This special use permit is required by the Forest Service to host a recreational family motorcycle enduro and an off-road motorcycle event in the forest,” Mike Fallon of Polka Dots writes. “These fees are primarily to cover the cost of an environmental assessment and secondarily for additional Forest Service monitoring for each event.”

Fallon notes that for decades the Forest Service has permitted such events without requiring environmental assessments and that, in fact, they were granted Categorical Exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act. With that exclusion, he said groups such as his were charged only a “nominal administration fee ... and never required volunteer-based organized clubs to pay cost recovery fees.”

Fallon goes on to note that Polka Dots took its name from the polka dot fabric that was popular in the 1950s when the club was formed. It has conducted similar events in the National Forests for more than 40 years, using existing, in place, long used and approved Off Highway Vehicle trails and forest roads for motorcycle events.

The annual Family event and Enduro Race have recently been canceled by the club due to uncertainty about the new requirements, Fallon said in a recent e-mail. The Family event generally attracts up to 300 riders while about 150 typically participate in the Enduro, he explained. Polka Dot club members do not ride in the events, but it takes about 30 of them to organize and staff the rides. Those events were originally scheduled to run in the South County areas of the forest around Caldor and Omo Ranch, Fallon noted.

“We have committed to paying a first installment of \$37,500 of the five-year fee requirement,” Fallon said in a phone interview last week. “It’s never been about the money. This is our fight to stay in the forest. Cancellation and rescheduling of the October Enduro is not as easy as just changing the calendar because of conflicts with other events in the area,” he said. “And we can’t just leave because then our adversaries will have won.”

Fallon also noted that the Forest Service “completed an environmental analysis of all roads and trails for the entire Eldorado National Forest in 2008.”

“Considering the Forest Service has completed an environmental analysis for all roads and trails on the forest, there is no logic in requiring the completion of an additional environmental analysis for individual or group users. The Forest Service appears to be implementing this new policy to erect a barrier to entry for OHV recreationists,” Fallon wrote.

Fallon asked, rhetorically, what has changed that the Forest Service now plans to require user groups to pay “cost recovery fees” for the environmental analysis. He answers his question by suggesting that the Forest Service has “caved in” to pressure from “anti-access” groups that have traditionally

opposed the California Enduro Racing Association. Fallon cites the Center for Biological Diversity as one of those groups and suggests that the threat of lawsuits may have persuaded the Forest Service not to issue a use permit for the events.

The Mountain Democrat sent a list of questions regarding the Polka Dots' concerns and allegations to the local Forest Service office, however, there was no response as of press time.

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