

Westside NEWS

Trail riders group leads the way in off-road management

■ OTRA is part of government move to develop Bear Creek Recreation Site as a destination

By Ross Freake
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Joani Dufourd is the Miss Manners of Okanagan dirt bikers.

The Oregon woman and her husband, Dick, both international off-highway vehicle consultants, were hired by the Okanagan Trail Riders Association, in conjunction with the Ministry of Tourism, Sports and the Arts, to transform the 35,000-hectare Bear Creek Recreation Site.

"The site will be the first designated and managed off-highway vehicle trail system in the province and will ultimately have a complete education and signage program along with signed trail system," the press release announcing the program claims.

The Bear Creek site has been an off-road riding area for about 25 years, but last year it was given more formal recognition and the association was awarded \$275,000 to plan, construct and maintain a sustainable network of trails.

The Dufourds' plan involves four Es — engineering, education and eti-

quette, enforcement and evaluation.

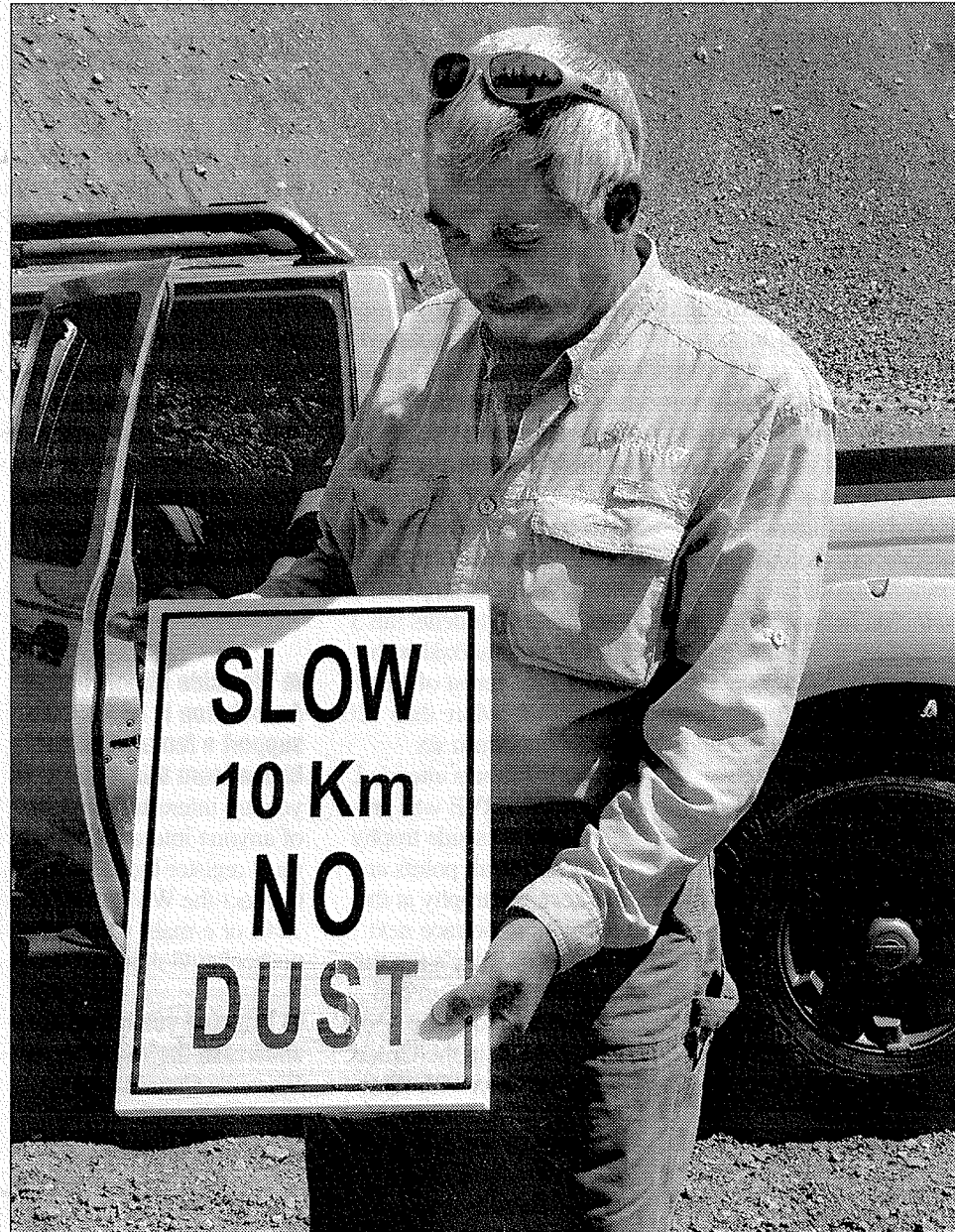
"Rider ethics is a new concept. It's not something that has been talked about much," said Joani. "The organized groups talk about it, but we're going to ratchet that way up. From the interviews I've done with the riders, most of them are brand new; they don't belong to a club and they are completely clueless as to where they can go when they come up here."

OTRA has about 300 members, but the Dufourds figure 3,000 people a year ride in the area and their noise shatters the peace and quiet for Rose Valley residents across the creek.

Last week, the Dufourds did decibel testing and one bike was revving at 105 DBs. "105 is 16 times louder than a bike at 96," Dick Dufourd said. "That is significant, so when we start getting people at 105 down close to 96, there's going to be an improvement."

They also plan to block off hill climbs and structure trails so road riding to get from one area to another will be unnecessary. But they also plan to build better trails and enhance the riding experience.

The sign that things are changing starts eight kilometres down Bear Creek Road. A tall sign directs people to the trails, but last week, the Dufourds added four commandments: riders



Ross Freake/Westside Weekly

Dick Dufourd displays one of the signs that will be going up in the Bear Creek Recreation Site as part of a campaign to educate off-highway vehicle users.

must stay on trails, be responsible, have a silencer, and a spark arrester.

Dick said riders now stay

in one area, compounding the noise problem, because there are no maps of the trail system.

"That forces people to ride on Bear Main and the first thing that happens, the throttle goes up and the

noise goes up; we have to stop that," he said.

"The other thing is, people are playing in this gravel pit," Dick said, waving at the trails ground into the gravel. "They line up on the other side of the road to get a run at it. This is a like a megaphone for over there. We intend to block this off."

There are skeptics, but the Dufourds know it will work because their company, RecConnect, did it in Oregon.

"In three years, we were 95 per cent compliant and that was an area just like this — totally unmanaged, and it had been that way for 25 to 40 years — and we changed that whole mindset into 'Stay on the designated trails, no more cross-country riding, you have to have your sound down, and spark arresters'."

OTRA president Ken Umbarger is convinced the plan will work and riders will see that not shattering the sound barrier is OK. "It will be cool to be stealthy and not cool to be noisy," he said. "It will take some time, but we'll enhance the riding experience and we'll make sure we're doing our part, that the water quality is as good as it can be and we're not causing any problems.

"In the first year, there will be some major changes, but by the second and third year, we'll see a dramatic change in riding." ■