

# Bridge work is ATV group's specialty

By **DAVE BUCHANAN**

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If you ever want to see some of the 300 or so members of the Western Slope ATV Association in action, just ask them to repair a trail or build a bridge.

The WSATVA's latest efforts involved laying several tons of rock on the approach to the Silver Spruce bridge in the Hightower Mountain area east of Vega Reservoir, said group president Steve Chapel.

The rock work was pretty straightforward, largely because in recent years the group has become well-known for the quality of its trail and bridge repair work.

"We had a husband and wife from Collbran drive up to see us after hearing we were going to be working in the area," Chapel said. "They said they have been everywhere there is to go up there over the last 50 years and they have come across our bridges, our rock work, our log fences and our trail maintenance and they wanted to come up and help us out."

Because there is plenty of work needed, the ATVers and U.S. Forest Service start each year with a definite plan, Chapel said.

"Every year in April, (we) meet with the Forest Service to discuss what we both think are the important issues," Chapel said in a recent e-mail. "We know the future of our trails depends on their sustainability as well as the way they are used or abused."

Having such volunteer efforts benefits both the forest and its many users, said Loren Paulson, district recreation manager for the Grand Valley Ranger District on the Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison national forests.

"This is how we get a lot of our trail maintenance done on our district," Paulson said. "Right now we have about 11 different groups that have adopted trails in our district."

Paulson said the groups include the WSATVA, the Backcountry Horsemen, Grand Mesa Nordic Council and others.

"I'd say about half of the trail mileage on our district has been adopted," Paulson said.

The Grand Valley district has about 780 miles of trails.

The other work involved constructing some width restrictors on the trail, a topic of some importance to ATV users.

National standards for ATV trails mandate a 50-inch maximum width for a trail marked for ATV use.

But vehicles keep getting bigger and now the so-call Utility Terrain Vehicles (UTVs) go 56 inches or more wide.

As Chapel said, that 50-inch maximum is important to keep trails from becoming roads.

"The larger the vehicle, the more damage is done to the trail," Chapel said. "The wider vehicles kick more rocks into the trail, making it more hazardous to others, and the trail automatically becomes as wide as the vehicle using it."

He said the majority of ATV users prefer a narrow trail to a road.

"Now that the wider side-by-side (UTVs) are getting popular,



**STEVE CHAPEL**/Special to The Daily Sentinel

**DAN RUSSELL AND DWIGHT BALMER** of the Western Slope ATV Association examine one of the group's recent accomplishments, a completed width restrictor to make sure ATVs less than 50 inches wide utilize a back-country trail.

that's one thing we get a lot of calls about," Paulson said. "It's a question of where you draw the line."

Chapel said his group and the Delta Thunder Mountain Wheelers have received grants for enough steel and concrete width restrictors to protect every ATV trail on Grand Mesa and the Uncompahgre Plateau.

Another value of the work done by the WSATVA and oth-

ers is that it frees the Forest Service to concentrate on trails that otherwise might not get attention, Paulson said.

Chapel said the group last year supplied 3,000 hours of volunteer work to the Grand Valley Ranger District.

"The main reason the ATV trails are in the good condition they are is due to our group and the Delta group's dedication," he said.

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