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Some Kane County residents don't like officials' road stance

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CEDAR CITY - Call it the Kane mutiny.

Some Kane County residents have posted a petition voicing their displeasure with their County Commission's efforts to claim ownership of specific rural roads, many of which cross public lands in the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.

"There are a lot of locals - even some who ride [all-terrain vehicles] - who are not pleased with the county's road [position]," area activist Sky Chaney said Tuesday. "They're holding their cards close to their chests because they don't want to be bullied."

Chaney and a "group of concerned citizens" published a guest editorial in the Dec. 7 edition of Kanab's *Southern Utah News* challenging the commission's stand. A nonbinding petition also popped up at a Kanab outdoor shop. Organizers plan to present the signatures - at least 60 so far - to commissioners.

"The commission has had no feedback from the public," Chaney said, "so we just wanted to respond publicly."

Under the county's off-highway-vehicle ordinance, all roads are open to OHV travel, an assertion that doesn't sit well with environmentalists or the Bureau of Land Management. In November, the commission amended that statute to include a process for closing a road to OHV use.

The grass-roots petition says "some concerned residents of Kane County do not, at this time, accept any of the routes claimed by Kane County as valid, legal OHV rights of ways." It also lists nine reasons challenging the county's assertions, including a lack of public support and documentation and fears about mounting legal costs.

Chaney, who helps coordinate a group called Land Use Volunteers for Kane County, says the petition drive is less about saving the environment than ensuring the county doesn't violate federal law or burden taxpayers with hefty legal bills.

"There are a lot more opposed to what the county's doing who don't want to speak out because they may have a family member who works for the county or other reason to be uncomfortable," said Jana Smith, who helped draft the petition.

Kane County Commissioner Mark Habbeshaw dismisses as preposterous any talk that critics face intimidation or retribution.

"The theme I hear, even from some who don't agree with us, is that the commission is open and listens to everyone," said Habbeshaw, who is leading the county's road battle with environmentalists and federal land managers.

"We've been seeking a judicial solution for years because that's the proper avenue," Habbeshaw said, "not a petition initiated by small segment of county residents."

The county is suing the BLM over its management plan for the Grand Staircase, and the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance is suing the county over its road claims.

Susan Hand, owner of Willow Canyon Outdoors, said Tuesday about 60 people have signed the petition posted at her business. She would like to see the county and the feds work out their disagreements through cooperation, not confrontation.

Commissioners "should be looking for solutions by addressing differences in a healthy way," she said.
"Instead, they fan the flames of conflict."

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