



## **Proposed Sand Mountain Exchange**

### **Current Status Update 8/10/2015**

#### **Background**

In 1996, over 60,000 acres of land within Washington County, Utah was designated as a desert reserve to protect the Mojave Desert Tortoise. Some of the land within the boundaries of the reserve belonged to private parties, but most of the land was previously open to OHV use. In response to the outcry from the OHV community, in 1999 Washington County and the BLM created the 44,000 acre Sand Mountain Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). About half of the SRMA was designated as Open Travel area for OHV use. The promise made was this area was set aside for OHV use indefinitely.

Over the course of the last 19 years, about half of the private lands within the reserve have been bought out or exchanged for BLM land outside the reserve. In 2012, the owner of the largest parcel of private land remaining within the reserve approached Washington County and requested they facilitate a land exchange, trading his 800 acres of land within the reserve for several parcels, the largest being 1,200 acres inside the SRMA.

From the OHV viewpoint, this is clearly not an “exchange.” It is a “take.”

#### **Current Status**

In the last few months, we have made considerable progress in protecting the SRMA open travel area. We have worked with Senator Orrin Hatch to create the Southern Utah OHV land bill, which is due to go to the Senate very soon. This bill will transfer ownership of approximately 19,000 acres of the SRMA to Washington County, with the stipulation that it be used as open travel area for OHVs.

The bill excludes 650 acres within the current OHV area, leaving it in BLM control. The developer has told the county commission he will accept that 650 acres, along with other parcels outside the SRMA, as partial payment for his land inside the reserve. The remaining amount will have to be paid off in long term payments. In order to transfer the 650 acres to the developer, the BLM will have to amend their current resource management plan (RMP). That change in the plan will have to go through the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process. This process requires public input and impact studies, including financial impact of the loss of recreational property within an area that makes well over 20% of

its revenue from recreation. If the amendment of the RMP meets significant resistance, it could take 3 to 5 years to reach a decision.

In a position statement given to the developer, county government, and BLM, Utah Public Lands Alliance stated we would vigorously oppose any transfer of property out of the OHV area. We will use all legal means to do this. We have the support of many land use organizations, including the Blue Ribbon Coalition (BRC), Utah 4 Wheel Drive Association (U4WDA), and the North American Motorized Recreation Council (NAMRC).