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Recreation, ranching collide

Lower Loop, Smith Hill, Bench closed to public

With the closure of the Lower Loop, Smith Hill and The Bench to all hikers and bicycle riders last week,

ranching and recreation are coming to a sharp conflict in the Crested Butte area.

Irma Kapushion and her

employee, Tom Gray, have posted no trespassing signs along these popular routes near town and fully intend to

stop all recreational use of these private lands. (No public lands are involved.)

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stop all recreational use of these private lands. (No public lands are involved.)

Kapushion, 57, runs 1000 cattle on lands owned by Evergreen Properties (formerly CF&I) and by a number of individuals. Her lease entitles her to control the land as if it were her own. She and her husband Bill, who died last year, have held the lease since 1956. Prior to that they lived in Crested Butte, where she taught school.

Kapushion explained, "I want to be fair. I want very much to get along with everyone. But this is my livelihood. I have to have the cattle fat by fall. The number of pounds I put on them means how many dollars I get in the fall.

"I'm really not a mean lady. I'm a very nice lady. I love Crested Butte. I like to cross-country ski," the rancher declared.

Tom Gray added, "We get no respect. No nothing.

People just walk on you and we've never had any cooperation whatsoever."

Neither Kapushion nor Gray could provide examples of any specific instances of direct conflict between cattle and recreationists. But both believe that dogs accompanying the recreationists will chase cows, thereby wearing the cattle down, taking pounds off, and moving them to the wrong pastures. Both also believe that bicycle riders will tend to disperse the cattle, though the effect is not as severe as dogs. Kapushion thinks the vast majority of bicycle riders are accompanied by dogs.

Kapushion also fears the possible future effects of unlimited recreation access. "If I say yes, then I have them in droves," she said. She worries that motorbikes will follow and says horseback riders can do just as much harm.

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Lower Loop, Smith Hill, Bench

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The C&P asked Steve Cook, owner of Paradise Bikes & Skis, for the bicyclists' side. Cook agreed that dogs can be a problem for cattle and that dogs are prevalent on the Lower Loop. It's a prime territory to exercise dogs because it's a short ride, he said. But on Smith Hill the ride is too long for dogs and he sees no dogs there. He suggested that dog owners exercise their animals on the Kebler Road, "even though it's boring."

But without dogs, "I don't feel I'm doing any harm. Certainly we get the cows off the trail. But I do not run the cows. Once they're off the road or trail, they stop."

Cook criticized Tom Gray: "He's rude in his approach. He is known to have shot dogs."

Some riders have suggested that Gray hates dogs.

To this, Gray responded, "I love dogs. I've got two of my own. But I would kill my own dog if he was hurting cattle. Part of my job is to protect cattle. Cattle are worth more than dogs are."

Kapushion said, "Tommy gets a little irate and I don't like that."

Cook predicted that the effect of the property closure will be "constant offenses of private property. We've been riding those lands for too many years."

Even if the sheriff began strict enforcement of the no



Tom Gray

--photo by Gnurps

trespassing rule, Cook thinks people would still ride there, "but not maliciously."

Some bicyclists do suspect that property owners themselves are being malicious. Tracy Smith said,

"They just don't want to see us having so much damn fun."

Cook noted that every valley and almost every trail in the area has cows.

One thought for a solution

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has been that the recreation community itself could some day lease the land. Such an idea may soon become more relevant for Kapushion hinted she may quit the business in the near future.

But Kapushion discounted that solution: "These bikers could not begin to pay what I pay in one month to run

close to 1000 cattle." Furthermore, the property owners would prefer use by agriculture because this gives them lower property taxes than if the land is used for recreation.

Kapushion plans soon to meet with officials of the town of Crested Butte.