

Arizona Senate passes HB 2551

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PHOENIX - The Arizona Senate on May 21 voted to pass House Bill 2551, a bill that clarifies state authority in how it will or won't enforce federal Travel Management Rules regarding off-highway vehicle use on U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management lands.

The legislation, sponsored by Sen. Chester Crandell (R-Heber) and Rep. David Gowan (R-Sierra Vista), passed by a 19-10 vote and will next be transmitted to Gov. Brewer for her consideration. HB 2551 previously passed the Arizona House on May 14 by a 34-25 vote.

The Arizona Game and Fish Commission voted on March 20 to support HB 2551, but made its support contingent on adoption of amended language that would address the commission's concerns about unintended limitations on officers' ability to enforce resource damage laws or road closures for public safety purposes, such as during forest fires. Subsequent amendments addressed the commission's concerns.

The bill permits Game and Fish officers to enforce laws related to habitat damage and other duties important to the department's mission, while giving officers discretion in enforcing federal travel management rules that are lower priority or that might impede achieving wildlife management objectives.

The Arizona Game and Fish Commission has expressed long-standing concerns that the new forest Travel Management Rules exceed science-based protection of habitat, put undue constraints on reasonable public access, are inconsistent across the different forests and therefore confusing to outdoor recreationists, and impede the commission's and department's ability to meet wildlife management objectives.