In the early 1990s, off-road vehicle (ORV) advocates illegally used explosives to open an old mining route which had long been eroded and impassable to vehicles. Motorcycles and ATVs continue to use this claimed RS 2477 right-of-way (ROW), which includes a portion of the Little Wild Horse Canyon trail—the most popular hiking trail in the San Rafael Swell.

After the national monument was established, Garfield and Kane Counties sent heavy equipment crews out to illegally “maintain” several claimed RS 2477 ROWs. The routes, some impassable by 4-wheel drives, were either redundant or gradually vanished in the desert. The counties asserted the ROWs in an effort to wrest control of the land from monument managers. A Utah federal court ruled that their claims were invalid, but the counties have appealed.

In 1976, the Smith family bought a ranch in Kane County, Utah. In 1999, the family returned home to find the Kane County road crew supervisor and the county attorney cutting the bolts off the Smith’s gate and tearing down their “No Trespassing” signs, claiming the property was an RS 2477 highway. As a result, the family faced several years of ORV use across their private ranch lands. They were forced to retain an attorney in defense of their private property and ultimately won in court.

After a decade of public debate and scientific studies, the National Park Service closed Salt Creek to ORV use in 2002 to stop impairment of park resources. Agency studies showed that vehicles driving up the streambed were causing serious environmental damage to wildlife, plant life and water quality in the park’s only perennial stream. In response, San Juan County claimed an RS 2477 ROW along Salt Creek and twice forced the Park Service to let county vehicles drive up the canyon.

In the early 1990s, off-road vehicle advocates sought to conduct an ORV event in Arch Canyon, an area closed to motorized use under the BLM management plan. Faced with public opposition to the event, the BLM granted an RS 2477 ROW and renounced its management authority over the route. As a result, ORVs regularly drive up this archeologically rich canyon, crossing a rare desert stream dozens of times, destroying riparian vegetation, and polluting the water. The BLM’s determination is currently under legal appeal.