

'I DIDN'T KNOW': More than 70 appealing fireworks ci

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Dave Olson, a recreation planner with the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, replaces a sign at the Silver Star Scenic Area trailhead. The forest service wants to keep all-terrain vehicles off the popular, scenic trail.

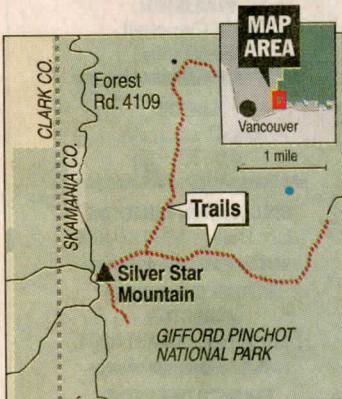
Boulders to discourage ATV use on popular trail

By ERIK ROBINSON
Columbian staff writer

SILVER STAR MOUNTAIN — Undulating earthen berms spiked with boulders welcome hikers to the head of one of the most spectacular trails in Southwest Washington.

The new landscaping should enable hikers to enjoy the steep slopes and alpine meadows in solitude, without the noise and muddy ruts created by 4-wheel-drive vehicles. Even though the U.S. Forest Service closed the Silver Star Scenic Area to motorized use as far back as 1989, its old roadbeds and close proximity to Portland-Vancouver proved to be too tempting for off-roaders to pass up.

"It's kind of like damming up a river where water wants to



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flow," said Tom Knappenberger, public affairs officer for the system from the end of Forest Road 4109.

The area, which is most effi-

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ciently accessed from Dole Valley Road northeast of Battle Ground, offers astounding views within an hour of Vancouver's city limits.

Mount St. Helens, Rainier, Adams and Hood pop up from the Cascade foothills. The skyline of downtown Portland, some 20 miles to the southwest, is a small smudge on an otherwise green landscape rolling all the way out to the Coast Range. Multicolored alpine meadows of wildflowers grow atop the 4,390-foot-tall mountain, where thin soils and high winds have inspired to block the return of forests wiped out by the Yacolt Burn of 1902.

Last year, hiking groups tapped a new source of federal money to meet their goal of keeping motorized vehicles off the trail. The \$66,000 project includes dozens of coffee-table-sized boulders transported from a Forest Service quarry and embedded into unauthorized tire ruts leading into the Silver Star trail system. Several boulders were similarly placed along roadway switchbacks littered with beer cans where 4-wheelers had powered through cutbacks in an alcohol-fueled quest for excitement. Signs warning against motorized trail use had been riddled with shotgun blasts.

No one's sure whether the barricades will work over the long term, so trail activists are hoping to work with federal and state law enforcement officers to keep off-roaders off the Silver Star trails. "Sometimes these closures become an attraction for them, like a challenge," said Dave Olson, a recreation planner for the Gifford Pinchot.

The barricades are funded partly by federal subsidies to timber-dependent counties, with the rest coming from volunteer labor from the Washington Trails Association and the Chinook Trail Association.



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Boulders are meant to discourage ATV drivers from attempting to blaze up Silver Star trail. Officials hope to work with law enforcement to prosecute violators.

Susan Saul, a longtime hiking activist from Vancouver, advocated the project through a local advisory committee established by the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2002. In short, the legislation provides federal money for projects endorsed by local advisory boards and approved by Gifford Pinchot supervisor Claire Lavelle. The legislation, which is due to expire in September of next year, offsets the loss of timber revenue to counties whose boundaries are covered by national forests.

Maggie Dowd, deputy manager of the Mount St. Helens ranger district, said the advisory committees enable the people who are often closest to the forest to identify needed projects. The initiative from Saul and the trail groups provided the impetus for a project that might have been years away if the Forest Service was left on its own, Dowd said. "We're very confident we can go, 'Susan, own it and love it,'" she said. Carol Jensen, an off-road vehicle activist from Longview, said members of organized groups such as the Pacific Northwest Four Wheel Drive Association generally respect closure orders. She said the problems occur when renegades ignore the closures, casting law-abiding members of the group in a bad light. Hikers and off-roaders both appreciate the natural beauty of the forest, Jensen said.

"We all want the same experience. It's just that we have a different way of getting there," she said. "I think there's plenty of room for both of us."