

May 2008

Volume 4, Number 3

# COHVCO News

COHVCO



The Official Publication of the Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition / [www.cohvco.org](http://www.cohvco.org)

## OPHIR ACCESS OHV FEE INCREASE



# Pauls Family Ensures Public Access in the Ophir Mining District

By Terry Peavler

COHVCO Director at Large

One of the greatest examples of what individuals can do to preserve public access to public lands is reaching fruition in the Ophir Pass area. After decades of planning, purchasing land, and dreaming, Glenn Pauls, his wife Dianne, and the Pauls family have transferred the first phase of the Ophir Mining Roads Public Access Preservation Project to the United States Forest Service. This transfer includes 109 acres and three building sites in the Water Fall Canyon area. These lands can never be developed and can never be closed to public motorized access!!

The Pauls family began visiting the San Juans in 1976, fell in love with the area, and returned frequently to jeep and motorcycle the trails. Many areas were closed off by their owners and No Trespassing signs were everywhere. In the mid 1980's the Pauls began purchasing properties and removing the gates and signs. Their thinking is that for decades jeepers, motorcyclists, mountain bikers, ATVers, hikers, and even hanggliders have shared the roads and gotten along perfectly well together.

Subsequently, however, the anti-access crowd moved in and persuaded the Forest Service to close public roads that have been open since the early mining days. Eventually only hikers could use the side roads on Ophir Pass and the pass itself was closed to unlicensed motor vehicles, even though Forest Service personnel admit that there is no visible damage occurring to the mostly stone roads in the area. After the Pauls threatened to cancel their Public Access Preservation Project, which when completed will have transferred 1200 acres, encompassing almost all of the mining claims in the Ophir valley, to the USFS, the pass was reopened.

The Pauls have worked with the Trust for



Public Lands or TPL, an organization that acquires land for public use and enjoyment and then transfers it to an interested government agency. TPL's projects involve properties that have public appeal but are not nature preserves or wilderness projects. TPL acquires its lands by direct purchase combined with large donations. The Pauls' wish to preserve public access to roads in the Ophir Valley was a perfect fit for TPL.

The Pauls' first major purchase was the entire holdings of two individuals (one of whom was John Wayne!) whose plans for a large silver mining operation or a ski area were thwarted by plummeting silver prices. In 1998, Glenn, Dianne and their children moved to the area to be closer to their project and the lands that they love.

Why have they devoted their lives to preserving lands so that you and I can enjoy them? Glenn Pauls explains: "There are many reasons to leave some of these roads open to public travel. We all at some point will not be able to walk these jeep trails, and there are also many disabled and injured who will never be able to go there.

Many travelers coming through here don't have the time, knowledge, or gear to hike in several miles. Many aren't acclimated to climb thousands of feet when they live at or around sea level. Some are even injured soldiers who have paid a high price defending this very country. The roads are what make this area a very special place. There are many areas in North America that you can look down upon as you fly over millions of square miles of mountains with no roads or trails that only a handful of people will ever travel through. Here though, people can traverse to the very peaks in a matter of hours and then have lunch in the valley towns that exist only because of upgraded mining roads. These roads are irreplaceable.... All this and more has to be considered before allowing

these roads along with their history to disappear."

Pauls went on to say that a very vocal minority should not be allowed to deny the public at large access to and use of the very lands that they pay for through their taxes: "all I am asking is that the Forest service give me some document providing for public access for all the uses that have historically been on these roads excluding Water Fall Canyon, Spring Gulch, Ferric Oxide Placer, and the St. Louis mine road.

In addition to their family project, The Pauls have joined with others to form an organization dedicated to preventing our public lands from becoming what Glenn calls "scenery behind glass." PAPA, the Public Access Preservation Association ([www.papatelluride.org](http://www.papatelluride.org)) will fight for any type of limited impact recreational user that is being denied access to public lands. They also work with local clubs to maintain roads and trails and to educate users about how to work together cooperatively and respectfully.

In parting, Glenn Pauls' final admonition was "Get involved or lose it." ♦

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