



Drivers warned about lack of easement on road into Pryor Mountains



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The Beartooth Ranger District is warning drivers that the route up Sage Creek Road into the west side of the Pryor Mountains is not a legal public easement, even though it's been used for decades.

"We got an indication from the (Crow) tribe reminding us that there is no legal access on that road," said Traute Parrie, district ranger. "We just

want to cover our bases. We felt it was timely to let people know where the legal access is."

Years ago the ranger district looked into gaining an easement so it could improve the Sage Creek Road into the mountains. The range, located south of Billings, contains a wild-horse herd, a prominent overlook of the Bighorn Valley and an ice cave. But the tribal ownership along the Sage Creek Road was so fractionalized that gaining easements from the numerous landowners seemed impossible. Without an easement, neither the Forest Service, Carbon County or Bighorn County have maintained the route, resulting in serious rutting and subsidence of the roadway.

"We'd still be interested in a single easement if the tribe had some ability to do that," Parrie said. "We expect to meet with the Crow to see what are our options."

Without that, in 2012 the district began pursuing a route across its own land, known as the Powerline Road since it follows an electrical line.

Construction of that road is awaiting a report from the State Historic Preservation Office before the Forest Service can complete its environmental analysis. If all goes well, Parrie said the first phase of improving what is currently a four-wheel drive road could begin next year.

"I expect we'll upgrade it in stages until we ultimately get to our goal," she said, which would be a route that accommodates passenger cars.

Until then, the district is advising travelers to use the Crooked Creek Road, which is located farther south. That road, rebuilt in 2010, is the only legal public route into the Pryor Mountains that can accommodate passenger cars.

The Crooked Creek Road is accessible from the small community of Warren along Highway 72 via the Helt Road and BLM's Road No. 1017. The Burnt Timber Ridge Road, No. 2849, is farther south and only an option for high-clearance four-wheel drive vehicles.

For more information on forest routes, contact the Beartooth Ranger District at 446-2103.

