

Local four-wheeler group wraps up desert cleanup season

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Havasu 4 Wheelers, a local off-road group, completed its desert cleanup efforts last week by embarking on an abandon vehicle round up.

About 30 volunteers turned out April 11, but only one of the five targeted vehicles was left to dig out. Unidentified members of the community had already stepped up to do the work not knowing the wrecks were on the organization's removal list.

"It's infectious," said club spokesman Bruce Speirs. "It was a pleasant surprise for us that someone took the initiative to help out." Speirs said the responsible citizens wished to remain nameless but said to him they were inspired to help out after learning of the club's recent desert cleanup efforts.

Last year, the club cleared seven abandoned vehicles from desert trails in the area. This year, there was just one to move - the stubborn one that stumped them in 2011. The vehicle was in Standard Wash about six miles from State Route 95. The nemesis vehicle was a burned-out Ford F-150 the group attempted to remove last year but managed only to drag it about 30 feet.

"Last year we couldn't get it out, it was digging in," said club member Steve Perry. This year, Perry fabricated skids from donated guardrail sections. Speirs said he estimates the vehicle's weight at about 4,000 pounds and described it as "an anchor" to the group during a safety briefing before the excursion.

"The truck is heavier because it's bigger," Speirs said. "It's a bigger challenge, and it presents bigger problems."

The volunteers used their Jeeps to winch the burned-out pickup truck onto its roof in order to affix the skids. The wreckage was then winched back onto its wheels and hooked up to a 2.5-ton surplus military cargo truck, owned by club member Ron Tingle.

Gary Sibble, an Environmental Rural Area Clean-up Enforcement investigator with Mohave County Parks Department, said of all five vehicles targeted for the group's removal project, the F-150 was the only one to be impounded. With the truck's vehicle identification number destroyed by fire, the truck would be inspected for its hidden V.I.N. numbers to determine its status. "(The truck) was stolen out of Lake Havasu in November 2005," Sibble said Monday. "It was found stripped and burned by the four wheelers club. It's owned now by the insurance company." The tow company files for fees associated with towing and storage of the vehicle. The vehicle is destined to be crushed after a crush title is obtained, he said.

According to Lake Havasu City Police Department police reports, the black 2000 Ford F-150 was reported stolen late Dec. 21 or early Dec. 22 in 2005 from outside a residence in the 2000 block of Sunken Tree Drive. It was noticed missing from the driveway after a friend of the victim stopped by just after midnight Dec. 22. And when the two went outside to smoke a cigarette, the owner realized the truck was gone.

The victim told police he believed he left the truck unlocked with the keys in it, even though he doesn't usually do so. Further investigations determined the victim wasn't behind in his payments and the truck wouldn't have been repossessed. The victim also checked with several of his friends to see if someone was playing a joke on him. The vehicle was valued at \$20,000.

Havasu 4 Wheelers' cleanup efforts from January to March in 2012 also include three separate excursions that fenced 17 open vertical mine shafts in five different nearby desert areas. Over the years, 25 shafts have been secured by the group.



About 30 Havasu 4 Wheelers club members volunteered April 11 to remove a wrecked, burned out vehicle that's been in Standard Wash, south of Lake Havasu City, for years. Jayne Hanson/News-Herald Photo

The project, in its third year, is a partnership with Bureau of Land Management, and is subsidized by a \$500 grant through Tread Lightly, a nonprofit organization that promotes responsible outdoor recreation, according to earlier reports.

The club's cleanup efforts go dark in the summer because of extreme temperatures. They plan to return in the fall of 2012 to begin surveying more open mine shafts for next year's round of closures in the Buck Mountains, which are accessed from the Franconia Road exit off Interstate 40.

"It needs to be done," said former club president Darryld Kautzmann, "You just get tired of seeing it setting there, it's an eyesore."

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