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Opinion: DTG's trail blockage is petty, unproductive

Yakima Herald-Republic Editorial Board

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Jacinto Nunez rides his bike on one of the Rocky Top trails Saturday, Aug. 13, 2022, in Yakima, Wash.

Evan Abell / Yakima Herald-Republic

Judging by the first three-plus years that DTG Recycle has operated its recycling center and construction landfill at Rocky Top, the company has been anything but neighborly.

After settling in, company representatives assured Cowiche Canyon Conservancy recreationists that the popular hiking, cycling and horseback trails that snake through the area wouldn't be affected for decades.

But then DTG began expanding its operations, generating complaints about trash, air quality, noise and possible groundwater contamination that finally caught the attention of state and local officials. After receiving months of neighbor complaints, the Yakima Health District, the Washington Department of Ecology and the Yakima Clean Air Agency have blocked DTG's expansion plans for the moment. The agencies have given the company a work list to complete that should bring the operation into compliance with regulations.

So now DTG is showing its petulant side.

Last week, the company abruptly closed off public access to 80 acres of land it owns on Rocky Top, effectively locking recreationists out of areas that they've enjoyed for years. Apparently feeling stymied by the regulatory agencies, DTG has decided to shift the direction of its expansion, resulting in the permanent closure of access.

In a news release, DTG blamed "neighbor complaints" for the change of plans but pledged to work with the William O. Douglas Trail Foundation to maintain trail access.

If it were serious about such high-minded promises, though, you'd think DTG would simply get going on that work list and get their company into compliance with the same rules that other recycling and landfill operations have to follow.

Or maybe, DTG would've tried to operate within those rules to begin with. Had they taken that approach, none of this would have even come up.

Friends of Rocky Top consultant Scott Cave put it as succinctly as anybody in an interview with the YH-R's Luke Thompson:

“Stop being out of compliance and we can stop complaining,” Cave said. “People don't want to spend their days having to track the operations of this facility.”

Instead, the company's response seems like a childish, vindictive slap at the people whose lives the DTG facility has disrupted. Especially if Friends of Rocky Top's Nancy Lust is correct in saying that the company could have expanded in a different direction — one that wouldn't have affected trail access at all.

Rather than striving to be a good community citizen, DTG's evident contempt for laws and neighborliness seriously threatens its credibility and its reputation.

If DTG's specialty is salvaging and recycling, we suggest it get to work on renovating its business model.

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