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Opinion: DTG should try harder to open trail access in Cowiche Canyon

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Leia, a chocolate Labrador, mourns the closure of part of the lower Rocky Top trail system on Friday, Feb. 3, 2023, after DTG Recycle expanded operations in Yakima, Wash. Magnus Fulton of West Valley High School / Unleashed

It's hard to imagine how a business could do a worse job with public relations than Snohomish County-based DTG Recycle has in the four years it's been in town.

After taking over the former Anderson Landfill on Rocky Top, DTG has tangled with local regulators, alienated most of its neighbors and frustrated outdoor recreationists.

Neighbors have complained bitterly of noise, smells, smoke and dust for several years now, and county officials even discovered an underground fire that's evidently still burning at the site. The fire, county officials assure, isn't threatening anyone.

Still, the limited purpose landfill has been idle since June, when the Yakima Health District denied the company an operating permit. Work continues, however, at DTG's sand and gravel operation — which has expanded from 59 acres to 122.

The expansion has led DTG to close off access to some beloved trails that hikers and bicyclists have enjoyed for years.

That's a sad setback for the whole community.

The trails and open spaces in Cowiche Canyon and Rocky Top are Yakima's equivalent to New York's Central Park. Where else can you take in sweeping views of shrub-steppe ridges razoring across a deep blue sky, stop to cool your tired feet in a refreshing stream and still make it back home within 15 minutes?

Limiting admittance to that oasis diminishes everyone's quality of life around here.

Representatives of the Cowiche Canyon Conservancy, the William O. Douglas Trail Foundation and Single Track Alliance of Yakima are still hoping DTG will agree to allow greater recreational access, but negotiations seem to be all uphill.

Considering all the toes they've stepped on in the past four years, though, you'd think DTG would be eager to do whatever they could to mend some fences — or more accurately, perhaps take a few of them down.

Cowiche Canyon Conservancy's executive director, Celia Hopkins, remains hopeful.

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“We are actively working right now to reconnect CCC's conservation easement to the city of Yakima property that contains both the William O. Douglas Trail and Walk N Roll Trail, Hopkins told the YH-R's Luke Thompson. “CCC is committed to having a multi-use trail system at Rocky Top and will continue to work with the city of Yakima and private landowners to maintain as much of a trail system as is possible up there.”

It seems reasonable to expect that from a company whose mission statement includes this phrase: “The way we treat people matters. They deserve our best.”

For the sake of earning Yakima's respect and trust, we hope DTG starts working harder to live up to those words. We hope they'll find ways to be better neighbors and accommodate Rocky Top recreationists.

Then again, public relations haven't exactly been DTG's strong suit so far.

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