

Activists arrested after trespassing incident near tar sands operation



SALT LAKE CITY — Seven women and three men were charged Monday with criminal trespass on school trust lands after they violated a closure order issued by the School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration.

A group of people organized a camping trip near the PR Spring Mine site as a protest activity led by the Utah Tar Sands Resistance.

The organization and other groups have held campout protests in the past — one in which 21 people were arrested — and dubbed last weekend's event the fourth Intergenerational Campout.

On Saturday, the group said it was conducting a "biodiversity" field trip when it encountered Ron Barton, a law enforcement agent with the Utah Attorney General's Office assigned to work with the trust lands administration.

Barton, in a probable cause statement on one of the arrests, said he was assigned to work in the area after the campout was advertised by several environmental groups.

The trust lands administration issued a public closure order for its property that it leases to U.S. Oil Sands and adjacent areas and posted no trespassing signs spaced 100 to 125 feet apart.

Barton said he observed the group for a while and also talked to a couple of U.S. Oil

Sands employees who said they saw people on the west side of Seep Ridge Road in an area that is posted as no trespassing.

A dozen people, including two children, were detained by Barton and informed of the trespassing violation. The two children were released into the custody of another adult who was not arrested, according to the report.

A news release from the environmental group Canyon Country Rising Tide expressed disappointment that people are being prevented from accessing public lands, but Barton noted he had distributed a map of the area covered by the closure order and copies of the order itself to multiple environmental organizations a year ago.

The trust lands administration issued the order after activists disrupted work in the area on a road by chaining themselves to heavy equipment. U.S. Oil Sands officials say it is also concerned the mix of camping protesters and industrial equipment like heavy trucks are not a good public safety mix.

The group was detained by Barton for four hours, but Barton described problems with communications because of the remote nature of the area. The actual mine site and plant are 90 minutes away from Vernal.

Those arrested and charged the class B misdemeanor are: Paul Bryon Wickelson, 38, Salt Lake City; Shea Alison Wickelson, 38, Salt Lake City; Deanna Lynn Taylor, 56, Salt Lake City; Cathryn Raphael Cordray, 45, Salt Lake City; Alexandra Binder, 24, Newton, Massachusetts; Melanie Jane Martin, 33, Salt Lake City; Julianna Sarah Parma, 26, Salt Lake City; Natasha Deininger, 27, Salt Lake City; Thomas King, 58, Salt Lake City; and Wesley Nelson Alzonzo, 23, Fort Collins, Colorado.

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