



Greg Mumm, Executive Director
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Hearing on Off-Highway Vehicle Management on Public Lands
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Thank you for the invitation to present personal testimony and for the opportunity to submit written comments regarding off-highway vehicle management on public lands.

The BlueRibbon Coalition (BRC) is a national recreational access advocacy organization with over 10,000 individual, business and organizational members representing approximately 600,000 individuals nationwide. BlueRibbon Coalition members use motorized and non-motorized means, including Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV), snowmobiles, equestrian, mountain bikes, and hiking to access and enjoy recreating upon state and federally-managed lands throughout the United States, including those of the National Forest System and Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

BlueRibbon Coalition serves as a leading advocate for responsible management of recreation on public lands. This role has included partnering with academia, conservations groups, and the agencies in scientific research and supporting educational projects to address excessively loud OHV exhaust noise, wildlife research, and other issues. We promote a strong trail ethic and work with groups such as Treadlightly! and the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC). BlueRibbon is a grassroots, user-supported nonprofit organization and has achieved a surprising prominence in the public land management arena.

BRC recognizes that over the past several decades there has been a marked growth in the popularity of motorized wheeled-vehicle based recreational pursuits with many contributing factors to that increase in popularity.

According to the most recent information in an ongoing OHV recreation study by the Southern Research Station of the Forest Service, there are 43 million Americans who enjoy off-highway vehicle recreation. Based on the most recent data from the study, 19.2 percent of the population 16 years of age and older participated in OHV recreation in the past year. Restated, that is nearly one in five Americans. Notably, the study also demonstrates that enthusiasts enjoy this type of recreational activity on the average of 27.9 days a year; or approximately 2 to 3 days per month.¹

¹ Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation in the United States and its Regions and States: An Update National Report from Nation Survey on Recreation and the environment (NSRE) February, 2008.

Additionally, motorized off-highway vehicles are also used to reach remote areas when taking part in other forms of recreational activity such as hunting, fishing, mountain-biking, and hiking. These enthusiasts benefit from using the very same roads, trails, and areas as those who enjoy OHV recreation by itself. This “shared use” activity takes place regularly. Virtually every public land user is motorized at some point in their visits to federal lands and it is simply a question of where they depart from their vehicle.

The economic benefits of OHV use deserve equal consideration. A compilation of several documented state studies indicates the economic benefits are substantial and a source of meaningful support to both rural and urban counties. For example, in 2007 the California State Parks’ Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division published a report describing the economic impact of OHV recreation in California as “an important element to the state’s economy” which contributes an estimated \$9 billion annually.² A similar report in Arizona estimated that OHV use generated nearly \$3 billion in retail sales during 2002.³ A 2001 Colorado study estimated OHV use yielded a \$500 million in revenue within the state.⁴

In Iowa, a state one wouldn’t normally think of in terms of OHV use, the estimated value of OHVs and related assets exceeds \$266 million. In 2007, the expenditures on new assets were over \$41.2 million and Iowa OHV users spent an estimated \$86.4 million per year on OHV equipment and activities; \$80.1 million is spent in Iowa, \$6.3 million is spent on trips out of state.⁵

An economic impact study in Minnesota focused only on All Terrain Vehicles (ATV) in 2006. The study found that resident direct expenditures for the average enthusiast household were \$172 per riding experience. This spending is equivalent to \$43 per person per day. The combination of these dollars with the number of riding experiences and other household factors results in \$641.9 million in consumer expenditures related strictly to ATV riding. Indeed, the Minnesota study indicates the total average impact of ATV related activity translates into an average of 14,449 jobs generating \$429 million in salaries and a total gross state product, or value-added from the ATV recreation industry, of \$920 million dollars and \$86 million in local and state tax revenues.⁶

² California State Parks Quick Facts 1/23/2007 California State Parks’ Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division

³ The Economic Importance of Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Study Prepared by Jonathan Silberman, PhD School of Management Arizona State University West

⁴ Hazen, S. (2001) Economic Contribution of Off-Highway Vehicle Use in Colorado, Colorado Off-Highway Coalition

⁵ The Economic Impact of Off-Highway Vehicles in Iowa Prepared for the Iowa Off-Highway Vehicle Association, Strategic Economics Group, Des Moines, Iowa, Daniel Otto and Harvey Siegelman, January, 2008

⁶ All-terrain Vehicles in Minnesota: Economic impact and consumer profile, *Prepared by* Ingrid E. Schneider, Ph.D., Tony Schoenecker, Graduate Research Assistant, *With the analytical assistance of:* Analysis & Evaluation at the Department of Employment & Economic Development, March 2006

Moreover, the OHV community uniquely contributes substantial funds to implement OHV management and volunteers hundreds of thousands of man hours in volunteer work projects. Much of these funds are made available to federal, state, and local land managers via state OHV programs. These programs exist today because years ago, motorized recreationists voluntarily “taxed themselves” via state OHV registration programs. Some of these funds are used to supplement OHV law enforcement, conservation, restoration, and safety programs.

BRC understands this marked growth in OHV activity presents significant challenges for land managers across this nation. BRC fully encourages and supports reasonable and responsible management prescriptions for this type of recreational activity. The OHV community also generally supports the various route designation processes, as well as, ongoing monitoring and maintenance of the OHV infrastructure.

The amount of state and locally provided opportunities for OHV recreation may range from none to ample, depending on the region of the country. In western states especially, federal agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the US Forest Service (USFS) provide the majority of opportunities for OHV use. Demand for such use is growing rapidly in those areas faced with limited opportunities.

There are solutions to these challenges through appropriate planning, maintenance, and monitoring. Active management for OHV recreation activities is the key and there are many working examples.

The Paiute Trail System in Utah is one such example. Established in 1990, this system consists of 871 miles of trails that interconnect with the Great Western Trail System, the Fremont Trail System and various other trails and networks for a total of over 1500 miles of successful application of active management for OHV recreation. With nearly 80,000 riders on the system in 2006 alone, the impact to the local economy was \$8.5 million. Small communities that were once dying economically are realizing growth and prosperity. As just one example, the little town of Marysvale in Paiute County, Utah, had once dwindled to only 7 businesses with more on the way out. Today, this rural community is thriving with over 27 businesses, most of which are directly or indirectly related to the Paiute Trail. According to a report by Max Reid of the Fishlake National Forest, “One campground along the Paiute Trail in Marysvale is an 80 unit campground established by Ron Bushman as a small side business. Today if you want to reserve a campsite space in Ron’s campground during the summer, you will have to hope for a cancellation because he is booked solid with over 90% of that booking from trail riders.”⁷

Another working example of active management for OHV is the Hatfield-McCoy Trail System in West Virginia. This system was first established in 1996 in what was considered an economically challenged area. Since the first trails were opened in 2000, it has proven to be a mutually beneficial public-private partnership. Today it is comprised

⁷ PAIUTE ATV TRAIL ECONOMIC OUTCOMES, *prepared by:* Max Reid, Public Service Staff, Fishlake National Forest (Updated Feb. 2007 to reflect the 2006 trail use figures)

of 5 trail systems, spanning 4 counties, and provides over 500 miles of trails, with plans to eventually exceed 2000 miles of trail. Since opening, the Hatfield-McCoy Trail System has received a great deal of national recognition for its standard of excellence and has been a major factor in improving the economic conditions of the area. The 2006 Economic Impact Study of the Hatfield-McCoy Trail System in West Virginia cites that, “For the state of West Virginia the total economic impact of the Hatfield-McCoy Trail System was an increase in output of \$7,776,116, an increase in income of \$2,789,036 and the generation of 146 new jobs.” The tax return of \$622,752 alone represents a 125% return on the state government’s annual investment of \$500,000 to the Hatfield-McCoy Trail System. The report further cites that, “When the returns to the state for additional output and income are considered the pay-off to public investment is 1,037 and 373.1 percent respectively.”⁸

The Hatfield-McCoy Trail System and the Paiute Trail System have proven their socio-economic value and they have also demonstrated environmental sustainability throughout their respective 12 and 18 year histories. They are shining examples of how well active management works. Similar examples of successful active management for OHV recreation are demonstrated in the San Bernardino National Forest in California, the East Fort Rock Trail System in Oregon, the Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area in Kentucky, and many other trail systems in Idaho, Montana, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Maine, and other states.

Properly managed motorized recreation presents both a service to citizens and a source of revenue. Such revenue is vital to rural counties who welcome recreation in lieu of other activities that no longer provide predictable or meaningful revenue, particularly for counties with significant federal public lands. A managed system of roads, trails and areas designated for motor vehicle use will better protect natural and cultural resources, address use conflicts, and secure sustainable opportunities for public enjoyment of public lands and National Forests. Properly-managed OHV systems provide an appropriate volume and diversity of road and trail opportunities for experiencing a variety of environments and modes of travel consistent with the policy of land management agencies.

BlueRibbon Coalition urges that the agencies’ allocation of budget, staff, and management effort reflect the growth of outdoor recreation. BRC believes the time has come to make managed recreation the BLM and Forest Service’s top priority as they comply with their multiple-use mandate.

In the early 1980s, the Forest Service and BLM recognized that the increase in popularity of OHV use required updated management. In 1986, the Forest Service conducted a service-wide review and outlined strategies that would update management plans to

⁸ The Economic Impact of the Hatfield-McCoy Trail System in West Virginia, October 31, 2006, *Prepared for:* The Hatfield-McCoy Regional Recreation Authority, *Prepared by:* Center for Business and Economic Research, Marshall University, One John Marshall Drive

address the increase in OHV use.⁹ For whatever reason, the agency largely failed to complete their action plan. Ten years later, in 1996, a second agency-wide review was performed.¹⁰ Similar issues were identified and a similar action plan was outlined.

These two Forest Service OHV reviews are instructive. The reports acknowledged that many successful and environmentally sustainable OHV trail systems existed across the agency, and that “unmanaged” OHV use was becoming a concern. But the agency had difficulty implementing its own recommendations. Prior to the promulgation of the Travel Management Rule in 2005, roughly one half of Forest Service units still had not updated their management plans. Indeed, the agency then estimated it had approximately 64 million acres of lands without any restrictions on motor vehicle use.

Even when considering the glacial nature of federal agency planning and implementation, it is worthwhile to ask why the agency failed to act upon its own recommendations. The reality is that environmental laws and agency regulations have become one-way gates that largely constrain active management of the forests. They often provide fodder for preservationist agendas designed to stop such active management through embroiling the agency in a war of procedural attrition.

By the late 1990s, the pace of litigation and pressure from both preservationist groups and the motorized community reached a critical stage. An anti-OHV lawsuit making its way to the Supreme Court apparently spurred both agencies into taking concrete action. The BLM updated its Land Use Planning directives to require all recreational trail use—including OHV use—to be limited to designated roads, trails and areas. In 2005, the Forest Service revised its travel management regulations, finally implementing some of the recommendations made twenty years earlier.

The development of regulations and policies that identify OHV recreation as a legitimate use of public lands and National Forests are important benchmarks. Requiring that motorized vehicles to be limited to designated roads, trails and “off-road areas” has been a significant step toward making managed recreation a top priority of both BLM and USFS. These are active management solutions that work socially and economically (as previously demonstrated), while simultaneously minimizing impacts to natural resources and enhancing the quality of other recreational pursuits.

For these reasons, the BlueRibbon Coalition, and the wider organized OHV community, generally support the “travel limited to designated roads, trails, and areas” paradigm as

⁹ OFF-ROAD VEHICLE AND TRAVEL MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY REVIEW OCT. 15-18 AND NOV. 2-7, 1986, Recommended by: Thomas P. Lennon, Team Leader, Aug. 10, 1987, Robert Spivey Act. Director, Recreation, Aug. 13, 1987, Recommended by Sterling J. Wilcox, Aug. 13, 1987, Director, Engineering, Approved by Larry Henson, Oct. 16, 1987, for J. LAMAR BEASLEY, Deputy Chief, NFS

¹⁰ FINAL REPORT, NATIONAL OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE (OHV) ACTIVITY REVIEW, 1996

outlined in the Forest Service travel management regulations and BLM's planning directives.¹¹

The OHV community is currently participating in travel management planning and implementation efforts across the country. We do so knowing that such a policy means that some areas will no longer be available for OHV use. We have already taxed ourselves to provide supplemental funds for management, and we are willing to accept reasonable restrictions. As we actively participate in this planning, it is our hope that the agencies will formulate management plans that provide recreational opportunity while minimizing environmental impacts and user conflict.

However, the BlueRibbon Coalition is very concerned that as agencies are finally putting years of awareness and study into action through these directives, it appears there is an underlying drive from certain anti-access groups to eliminate OHV recreation on most public lands. We are only half-way into implementing these solutions. We need the time and cooperation to finish the job. As managing agencies and enthusiasts work together to find solutions on the ground, we ask said groups for their support. We believe our collective energies would be better spent providing information to the agencies and working toward real management solutions that can allow more Americans to visit our public lands while preserving the natural beauty that makes these lands special.

The OHV community is also justifiably concerned about the agencies' commitment to effective implementation of the "restricted or limited to designated roads, trails, and areas" policy. The policy is supposedly motivated by a need to address "unmanaged recreation," but good management will not flow from the whisk of a pen in Washington, D.C. Successful policy implementation must be accompanied by adequate budget and staffing. Above all, implementation must be accompanied by management's priority to achieve critical on-the-ground goals.

Certainly, these on-the-ground goals need to include the concepts of fostering compliance; adequate law enforcement; collaboration with recreationists and local communities; and long-term sustainability.

Compliance and enforcement go hand in hand. A well designed, successful system meets the needs and desires of the user. This, in turn, results in compliance and requires a reduced level of enforcement. Conversely, in the absence of these active management elements, enforcement becomes a bigger issue.

Successful trail systems can and should be designed by applying the elements of Education, Engineering, Enforcement, and Evaluation, or the four "Es", as promoted by the NOHVCC. NOHVCC states, "Proper implementation of the four "Es" produces trails that riders want to stay on, not just trails they have to stay on. Well-managed systems are not only environmentally sustainable, they also provide more fun for the riders and

¹¹ USFS: 36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295. Similar to the Forest Service, the BLM now restricts all OHV use to roads, trails and areas via their Land Use Planning directives: *Land Use Planning Handbook H-1601-1 appendix C*. Specific route designation criteria are specified in 43 CFR Part 8342.1.

increased economic and social benefits to the surrounding communities.” (Note: emphasis added)¹² Simply put, if you tell those 43 million Americans who enjoy OHV recreation what they CAN do and provide them with quality opportunities and ownership through cooperative involvement and management, it will produce compliance.

To that end, through the similar strategies of active management and designated route systems federal land managers are making significant progress. BRC urges this committee to support agency efforts to actively manage for OHV recreation. BRC also urges this committee to support fiscal appropriations to help the federal agencies meet their recreation management objectives.

Again, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony and written comments.

Sincerely,



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¹² Remarks to House Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public lands, Hearing on “Impacts of Unmanaged Off-Road Vehicles on Federal Lands”, Russ Ehnes, Executive Director, National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council, March 12, 2008