

**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”

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Russ Ehnes and I'm the Executive Director of the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council or NOHVCC (pronounced no-vac). My family, including my wife, son, daughter, parents, uncles, and grandfather are among the millions of Americans who enjoy responsible recreational off-highway vehicle use on our public lands.

NOHVCC is a non-profit organization dedicated to creating a positive future for OHV recreation. We do this through a variety of training and educational programs and through information distribution. We encourage OHV enthusiasts to become involved in organizations that promote responsibility and environmental ethics. We also work closely with the National Association of OHV Program Managers and conduct a joint conference each year to share the latest information regarding OHV recreation management.

I was pleased to see that the title of this hearing acknowledges that unmanaged recreation on public lands is a topic for discussion. It implies that management of OHV recreation is necessary, a statement I strongly agree with and a core belief of NOHVCC that drives much of the work our organization is doing, and has done for the past eighteen years.

In fact, NOHVCC has been supportive of both the US Forest Service Travel Management Rule and the BLM National OHV Strategy. In an effort to help successfully implement the Forest Service Travel Management Rule, NOHVCC with the financial support of the Motorcycle Industry Council and the Specialty Vehicle Institute of America, and in consultation with several other national organizations conducted 20 four-day workshops in 14 states. Representatives from the agency and the motorized and non-motorized public participated in the workshops, which were designed to increase public understanding of, and involvement in the process, which will ultimately result in a more successful implementation of the rule.

Active management of OHV recreation works as has been proven by many successful OHV recreation areas across the nation. Examples include the Hatfield-McCoy Trail System in West Virginia, the Paiute ATV Trail in Utah, the San Bernardino National Forest in California, and The East Fort Rock trail system in Oregon, along with less well-known trail systems in Idaho, Montana, Michigan and other states. The key to the success of these areas is active management.

NOHVCC has worked hard to help spread the successes through a variety of programs. Over the past ten years we have conducted over 30 OHV Management Workshops across the nation. These workshops are multi-day sessions that bring OHV management experts together with land managers, OHV enthusiasts and non-motorized recreationists to learn about the four “E’s” of management, an approach explained in great detail in our publication “Management Guidelines for OHV Recreation” and the cornerstone of every successful trail system in the country.

Simply stated, trail systems can be successful by applying Education, Engineering, Enforcement, and Evaluation, or the four “E’s.” The results are high quality, environmentally sustainable trail systems that meet the needs and desires of the public. Proper implementation of the four “E’s” 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 increased economic and social benefits to the surrounding communities.

Active management is the key to success. When OHV management first became an issue in the 60’s and early 70’s, the agencies generally had an approach that amounted to “ignore it or close it.” Through hard work by OHV activists and groups like the Motorcycle Industry Council and the American Motorcyclist Association, partnerships were established with the BLM and Forest Service that have resulted in many well managed, high quality opportunities for OHV recreation.

Unfortunately, some groups advocate the wholesale closure of public lands, which is a move backwards in the direction of the failed “ignore it or close it” approach of the past. Active management works, it is succeeding in many areas and can succeed in many others. We will continue to work to implement successful management techniques across the nation, but it will not be easy.

It will take the continued commitment of the OHV community through the hundreds of thousands of hours of volunteer work it performs each year. The need for volunteer programs will increase and we will answer that call. It will also take continued commitment from the agencies, which I believe, in part, lies in your hands. Agency budgets are extremely tight, especially for recreational programs. Outdoor recreation and our pride in our public lands define the American people and we believe recreation budgets deserve the necessary support to help maintain our public lands. In addition, most OHV recreationists are willing to pay user fees through the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act provided their money goes back to the facility they enjoy.

Active management does work. The Forest Service Travel Management Rule and the BLM OHV Strategy are making good progress. We are dedicated to helping them succeed not only through our Management Workshops but also through efforts to build volunteerism through our ethics education programs.