



Americans for Responsible Recreational Access

Testimony before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands
July 13, 2005
“Motorized Recreational Use on Federal Land”

Mr. Chairman:

My name is Larry Smith and I am here today in my capacity as Executive Director of ARRA, Americans for Responsible Recreational Access. We are very pleased that your subcommittee is conducting this hearing on “Motorized Recreational Use on Federal Land”.

The topic of this hearing is timely and appropriate for this subcommittee’s attention. In short, motorized recreational use on Federal land is booming. More and more Americans are seeking recreational opportunities on our public lands and much of these activities involve motorized recreation.

Statistics tell the story:

In 2002, National Forests and Grasslands had 214 million visits

In 2002, the National Park System had 421 million visits

In 2004, the Bureau of the Land Management had 54 million visits

The number of OHV users of our national forests has increased sevenfold in 30 years, from 5 million in 1972 to over 36 million in 2000

In ten years, combined sales of off-highway motorcycles and ATVs have increased almost 205%.

There are currently over 2.4 million off-highway motorcycles in use and approximately 5.6 million all-terrain vehicles.

More and more Americans, of all ages and physical abilities, are seeking access to our public lands and waterways, and they are using every possible means to get there. By foot, bicycles, off-highway motorcycles, ATVs, personal watercraft, boats, snowmobiles, SUVs and RVs. Mr. Chairman, things have changed just a little bit since the time pioneers rode on horseback or in

their covered wagons to explore your part of the west. But one thing hasn't changed, that is the American spirit to explore and to enjoy the great outdoors.

Considering these statistics and the popularity of motorized recreation, it is not a surprise that the Forest Service, the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management have all begun to explore various ways to manage motorized recreation. For example, the Forest Service has begun that process by working on a rule that would require all OHV travel to be on designated routes. When the proposed rule was open for comment, ARRA supported the premise of designated routes. The volume of ridership is such that designated routes for OHV recreation are a necessity if the Forest Service is going to be able to manage this very popular means of recreation.

But while we support the OHV designation rule, we do have concerns. One of those concerns rests with the fact that the Forest Service has decided not to seek specific, appropriated funds for the implementation of this rule. Forest Service managers tell us that they believe that they can handle this process through existing budgets within the agency. We hope this will be the case. But frankly, it will only take a severe fire season to place such well intended plans in the freezer.

Without the means to conduct a comprehensive inventory of existing OHV trails prior to the actual designation process, Forest Service travel planners will not have the data available to them to make decisions on which routes are appropriate for motorized recreation.

We also believe that the process of designation of OHV routes must be as transparent as possible to all interested parties. There will be vast differences between pro-access folks and those who want to limit access. Unless the process of designation is transparent for all to see how decisions are made, the results will be tied up in endless litigation, a result that will not serve the interests of any American.

For the OHV designation process to work, we believe the agency needs to enlist the assistance of volunteers for the inventory process, for trail maintenance. The agency has done a good job in the past engaging motorized sports enthusiasts in a variety of projects of benefit to our National Forests and motorized recreation. The future requires such engagement with volunteers all the more.

We also believe there is a role that non-governmental entities can play in making the OHV designation process a success. Creating partnerships between the recreation community and our Federal land agencies is one such step. In anticipation of the final OHV rule, we have begun to explore such avenues with Forest Service personnel.

Once the designation process is completed, the Forest Service needs to educate the visiting public on what is and what is not designated as OHV routes. This means that signage, mapping, and educational information must be readily accessible to the general public. And by being accessible, we mean utilizing the internet as well as GPS technology.

Finally, the enforcement of a set of consistent regulations and standards for recreational behavior must be a key strategy followed by every National Forest. Consistency in enforcement and the application of the law will serve to enhance the recreational experience of the American public.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing. The popularity of motorized recreation on public lands is growing and will continue to grow in the decades ahead. Providing our land agencies with the financial tools necessary for the management of this use is one important contribution the Congress can make to this effort.