

CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

BECAUSE LIFE IS GOOD

OFF-ROAD VEHICLE REFORM: PROTECTING OUR FORESTS

Motorized access is increasing in scope and popularity on public lands. National forests are being subjected to unprecedented damage as a result. In 2005, the Forest Service released a rule to govern the use of off-road vehicles (ORVs) and prohibit cross country travel. The Center for Biological Diversity is committed to being a key part of the implementation of this rule by working with conservation groups, government agencies and off-road vehicle riders to minimize associated damages and preserve natural resources.

FOREST SERVICE ORV RULE

The ORV rule states that all 155 national forests and 20 grasslands in the country will work collaboratively with the public to identify and designate roads and trails that are suitable for motor vehicle use. This is one step in the right direction toward preserving lands on national forests.

WHAT IS THE RULE?

A rare and long overdue opportunity for the Forest Service to finally curb one of the most destructive uses of public lands. It is also a chance to remedy decades of damage and prevent further destruction.



Photo by Chris Kassir

REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Conservation groups have come together in the Southwest to protect wild places from continued abuse of public lands, seeking consistency in implementation of the Rule throughout the region. We seek congressional support for prohibitions on cross-country travel for camping and motorized game retrieval. Travel Management Planners should strive for route densities that do not exceed 1 mile per square mile. User created routes should not be part of the designated system.

ON THE ROAD TO A SOLUTION

SUPPORT legislative oversight hearings.

RECOMMENDATIONS to Game and Fish to reduce motorized game retrieval.

FULLY FUND the travel management process.

PROVIDE resources for enforcement and mitigation.

DEFEND wilderness and roadless area designations.

FOREST FACT:

In 2001, the Forest Service estimated that 60,000 miles of user-created routes lace our national forests. If these are designated as system routes, they will represent an approximately 13 percent increase in roads on Forest Service land.

IMPACTS OF ORV USE

Scientists have recognized and warned of the impacts of off-road vehicles for decades. Effects on wildlife, habitat, vegetation, soil, air, water and other users are often severe, far-reaching, interconnected and obvious to even the most casual observers. Although we discuss them separately, the actual environmental effects are cumulative because seemingly small, individual impacts may result in large-scale changes, altering the entire ecology of an area. As a result, few species or habitats are completely immune to the effects of off-road vehicle recreation.



Photo by Steve Dowlan

ORVs threaten habitat of the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher.

ORVs AFFECT WILDLIFE

Habitat Fragmentation & Loss
Road Kills
Increased Disturbance & Stress
Air & Noise Pollution

ORVs AFFECT THE LAND

Soil Erosion
Invasion of Exotic & Noxious Weeds
Soil Compaction
Damage to Vegetation



Photo by Chris Kassir

Proliferation of tracks in the Santa Fe National Forest near Medandales, New Mexico.



Photo by Chris Kassir

Routes through or near water increase stream turbidity and degrade habitat.

ORVs AFFECT AQUATIC AREAS

Decreased Water Quality
Increased Sedimentation & Cloudiness
Damage to Critical Habitat
Altered Water Flow Patterns

IRRESPONSIBLE ORV USE HAS OTHER IMPACTS

Damage to Cultural Resources
Increased Wildfire Risk
Disturbance of Other Users

YOU CAN HELP

As planning proceeds on national forests, the Center will push for protection of wildlife, habitat, and wild spaces. Funding for enforcement is the missing link in this long overdue opportunity to protect one of our nation's most valuable resources. We need congressional support to keep agencies focused on these issues while they develop plans for reining in off-road vehicle abuse. For more information please contact:

Cyndi Tuell at 520-623-5252 ext. 308 or ctuell@biologicaldiversity.org

www.endangeredearth.org/orv

FOREST FACT:

Habitat destruction and the spread of alien species have been ranked as the two greatest threats to biodiversity. Off-road vehicles contribute to both of these.

Wilcove D. S., D. Rothstein, J. Dubow, and A. L. E. Phillips. 1998. Quantifying threats to imperiled species in the United States. Bioscience 48 : 1-15.