

► CHAPTER 8

Top Statewide Trail Issues and Strategic Actions



INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a description of the most significant issues effecting recreational trail provision in the state of Oregon. It also provides a framework for collective action in addressing these issues for the next ten years.

The previous chapter describes the process used to determine top statewide trail issues. Top statewide trail issues were finalized at the trails advisory committee meetings for each trail category type. A set of strategic actions for addressing each statewide issue were also finalized at the trails advisory committee meetings.

OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE TRAIL ISSUES AND ACTIONS

Statewide Issue 1: Closure of trails

Closure of Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) trails was identified as a top motorized trail issue during the trail's planning public workshops, in the statewide survey of resident OHV riders, and during the July 29, 2015 OHV trails plan advisory committee meeting.

The majority of OHV trails and riding areas in Oregon are on federal lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). In recent years, these federal agencies have begun to reevaluate the procedures they use to make OHV designations—or are in the process of developing additional regulations for OHV use—in light of the recent increase in popularity of OHV use. Specifically, in 2005, the USFS issued a travel management regulation, in part to standardize the



process that individual national forests and grasslands use to designate the roads, trails, and areas that will be open to motorized travel. Prior to travel management, unless a road or trail is designated closed, it's considered open. Under the new rule, roads, trails and areas will be considered closed to motorized use unless they're designated as open.

The Travel Management Rule was passed because of a need to resolve a number of resource and social concerns related to unregulated motorized travel that were detailed in the Rule. These included concerns such as:

1. Confusion about where or when motorized access is or is not allowed, or for what type of vehicle, and how or where to find that information.
2. Resource damage from inappropriate motorized uses.
3. Conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users.
4. Quality of recreational experiences for all forest users.

This designation process applies only to motorized vehicles and does not address other forms of transportation, such as biking, horseback riding, and hiking. After roads, trails, and areas are designated, the travel management regulation requires that

motorized travel be limited to designated roads, trails, and areas, reducing the acreage within national forests that is open to cross-country travel. The travel management regulation also requires that designated roads, trails, and areas be displayed on a motor vehicle use map. The USFS developed a schedule to complete the route designations and to develop the required motor vehicle use maps by the end of calendar 2009. In January 2009, the USFS updated its travel management guidance to provide individual forests with details on how to designate roads, trails, and areas for motorized use. This guidance, among other things, describes the process that forests should go through to make travel management decisions, including the criteria for making these decisions. These criteria include effects on natural and cultural resources, effects on public safety, provision of recreation opportunities, access needs, conflicts among uses of national forest lands, the need for maintenance, and the availability of resources for such maintenance.

Like the Forest Service, BLM has also begun to reevaluate the procedures it uses to make OHV designations. Over the past 10 years, BLM has issued increasingly detailed guidance on how its field offices should address travel management in their resource management plans. In accordance with the executive orders, BLM regulations require that all its lands be given an area designation of either open, limited, or closed with respect to motorized travel and that these designations be based on protecting resources, promoting the safety of users, and minimizing conflicts between users. Open areas are areas where all types of vehicle use are permitted at all times, anywhere in the area. Limited areas are lands where OHV use is restricted at certain times or use is only authorized on designated routes, and close areas are lands where OHV use is prohibited.

BLM's most recent guidance, issued in 2007, provided additional details related to how field units should conduct travel planning in the context of resource management planning. While updating a resource management plan, BLM field unit officials are to

inventory and evaluate OHV routes and area designations (such as open, limited, and closed), seek public input, and make changes as appropriate. For areas designated for limited OHV use, BLM guidance states that the resource management plan must include a map identifying the OHV route system. In addition, because of recent increases in OHV use on public lands and the potential for related resource damage, BLM's latest guidance encourages field units not to designate large areas as open to cross-country motorized travel.

Action 1: USFS Region 6 should place a higher priority on motorized recreation in Oregon.

Action 2: Federal land managers should make outdoor recreation management a viable career path within their agencies.

Action 3: Land managers should hold monthly local multi-user recreation committee meetings to gather public feedback regarding trail issues and concerns.

Action 4: The USFS and BLM should provide funding from the federal budget to create a staff position dedicated to OHV management at the Portland Region 6 office.

Action 5: The USFS and BLM should allocate adequate resources for travel management planning in Oregon.

Action 6: Federal land managers should follow travel management guidelines when conducting travel management planning in Oregon.

Action 7: Federal land managers should adopt the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC) motorized access plan agreement for engaging OHV clubs in travel management planning in Oregon.

Action 8: A Federal funding mechanism should be implemented to fund increased OHV law enforcement, trail maintenance, user education, signage, mapping, and rehabilitation of damaged areas.

Action 9: Reduce unwarranted OHV closures through comprehensive review/input/analysis by all stakeholders.

Action 10: No Oregon ATV grant funds will be used for federal travel management planning.

Action 11: Land managers should work with user groups to inventory all existing roads and trails prior to the start of travel management planning.

Action 12: As federal recreation budgets decline, land managers should build more public-private partnerships (e.g., with OHV user groups and manufacturers) to manage OHV recreation on federal lands in Oregon (e.g., trail maintenance, trail building, user education). For example, the Stay the Trail program, a joint project between the Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition and Federal agencies, reinforces and highlights responsible OHV use and seeks to reduce irresponsible use, thus minimizing resource damage.

Action 13: The USFS and BLM should develop user-friendly maps and signs for route systems including large format signage, on-the-ground route markers, and information kiosks with maps to inform riders of the law and indicate where they can legally ride.

Action 14: Land managers should close or relocate problem OHV routes.

Action 15: Work with Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) and OHV manufacturers and dealers to stop the use of product development and marketing strategies (e.g., vehicles riding off-routes and cross-country) which are in conflict with travel management objectives.

Statewide Issue 2: Closure of unimproved backcountry roads

Closure of unimproved backcountry roads was identified as a top statewide OHV trail issue during the trails planning workshops, in the statewide survey

of resident OHV riders, and during the July 29, 2015 OHV trails plan advisory committee meeting.

Nationally, the Forest Service manages approximately 280,000 miles of National Forest System roads open to motor vehicle use. In addition, approximately 144,000 miles of trails are managed by the Forest Service, with an estimated 33 percent or 47,000 miles open to motor vehicle use. This transportation system ranges from paved roads, designed for passenger cars to single-track trails used by dirt bikes. Many roads designed for high-clearance vehicles (such as log trucks, and sport utility vehicles) also accommodate use by ATVs and other OHVs not normally found on city streets.

In Oregon, the USFS manages approximately 72,000 miles and the BLM another 21,000 miles of unpaved backcountry roads. In the 1960s, motorized recreational traffic on the National Forest System roads was relatively light compared with timber traffic. Today, recreational traffic is 90 percent of all traffic on National Forest System roads. Much of the road system maintenance needs and resource damage concerns are the result of continuous recreation use of roads only designed for controlled intermittent commercial use. During transportation planning, the USFS and BLM consider capability to maintain roads in decisions to designate roads for motorized use.



Transportation planning is being conducted as the USFS considers how to maintain logging roads no longer used for timber harvesting traffic. For example, the Mount Hood National Forest has about 3,380 miles of logging roads, built when it produced up to 370 million board feet of timber annually, as it did in 1990. Due primarily to environmental restrictions, timber sales now are about 25 million board feet annually, according to forest reports. The USFS will decide which roads to maintain, close or decommission.

Action 1: No state ATV grant funds should be used for closing and decommissioning unimproved backcountry roads in Oregon.

Action 2: Oregon land managers should consider the importance of shared-use roads for OHV use.

Action 3: Federal land managers should follow travel management guidelines when conducting travel management planning in Oregon.

Action 4: Federal land managers should adopt the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC) motorized access plan agreement for engaging OHV clubs in travel management planning in Oregon.

Action 5: Land managers should develop standard motor vehicle use maps for each management area in a consistent manner that provides adequate detail to inform users of the open areas and serves as legal notification for enforcement purposes.

Action 6: Reduce unwarranted OHV closures through comprehensive review/input/analysis by all stakeholders.

Action 7: Land managers should work with user groups to inventory all existing roads and trails prior to the start of travel management planning.

Action 8: Land managers should develop user-friendly maps and signs for route systems including large format signage, on-the-ground

route markers, and information kiosks with maps to inform riders of the law and indicate where they can legally ride.

Action 9: Land managers should close or relocate problem OHV routes.

Action 10: Work with Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) and OHV manufactures and dealers to stop the use of product development and marketing strategies (e.g., vehicles riding off-routes and cross-country) which are in conflict with travel management objectives.

Statewide Issue 3: Riding in closed areas

The problem of OHV riding in closed areas was identified as a top motorized trail issue in the survey of OHV area providers and during the July 29, 2015 OHV trails plan advisory committee meeting.

The USFS and other land managers have been confronted with a proliferation of trails arising from repeated unauthorized travel by OHVs. Such behavior can result from areas not being properly mapped, signed, or marked clearly as open or closed; or recreationists ignoring designations. A number of motorized users simply don't understand and/or have a lack of appropriate trail ethics. Cross-country travel occurs and unauthorized trails are created which adversely affect wildlife habitat, watersheds, cultural resources, grazing and other multiple-use activities.

Action 1: Land managers should develop OHV system plans which include a variety of riding challenge opportunities (easy, more difficult, most difficult) to satisfy diverse user needs. System plans should also develop OHV connectors and networks to create loop trails or provide longer rides.

Action 2: Land managers should provide trailhead kiosks to inform visitors about trail level-of-difficulty and available riding opportunities.



Action 3: Land managers should quickly repair resource damage caused by off-trail riding before more damage occurs. This may include land restoration, revegetation, invasive species treatment, long-term rehabilitation, barriers, route realignments, or closures. In some cases, alternative (sustainable) routes will need to replace user created trails. Replacement routes should be constructed and opened prior to closing off user created routes.

Action 4: Land managers should develop user-friendly maps and signs for route systems including large format signage, on-the-ground route markers, and information kiosks with maps to inform riders of the law and indicate where they can legally ride.