

Testimony of Dan Kleen

Subcommittee on the National Parks, Forest and Public Lands

U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Natural Resources

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Good Morning, Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Subcommittee Members.

My name is Dan Kleen, I live in Pocahontas, Iowa. I am the President of the Board of Directors for the National off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC) and I appreciate this opportunity to testify before you today in support of H.R. 1581 and to share with you a different point of view when it comes to access to our Public Lands.

I have been involved with NOHVCC for 16 years, and I have also been involved with the Iowa Off-Highway Vehicle Association for more than 20 years. My involvement with these groups has not only allowed me to meet some great people, it has given me the opportunity to visit and enjoy some of our beautiful Public Lands. I have been able to ride in California, Oregon, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, New Mexico, Texas, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, Michigan, Ohio, West Virginia, North Carolina and parts of Canada. I have truly appreciated and enjoyed each trip. None of these great experiences would have been possible without the use of my Off-Highway Vehicles.

Many of the areas I had the privilege of riding were on Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands. As a result I support H.R. 1581, which would release areas that have been deemed not suitable for wilderness designation by the appropriate agency and allow them to be used for multiple uses. While I understand that OHV recreation isn't appropriate on every acre of public land, I believe that land managers should have the ability to manage and H.R. 1581 would allow them to make better decisions on areas that have been in limbo for decades.

I would also like to take this opportunity to share with you how many of the over 54 million Americans with disabilities may use Off-Highway Vehicles (ATVs, Side by Sides, Motorcycles, Full Size 4X4s and other vehicles) to recreate on some of our nation's most beautiful areas with our families and friends.

Almost 20% of Americans are living with some sort of disability. That is the combined populations of California and Florida. Wheelchair users like myself make up 3.3 million of that total. When you look at the aging of America it is estimated that by 2030, 71.5 million Americans will be over the age of 65. One in every Five of us in this room are already dealing with, or may have to deal with a disability in our lifetime. Hopefully all of us will get to deal with the aging issue.

How and where Americans with special needs choose to recreate with their families and friends may vary. For myself, and many others, Off-Highway Vehicles make it possible to participate in and enjoy

more experiences while lessening the burden to those we want to spend time with. Improving independence for people with disabilities also improves quality of life.

I grew up on an Iowa farm. Some of my fondest memories are of hunting, fishing, riding motorcycles, snowmobiles and horses with my family and friends. In 1987 I was injured in a diving accident, I'm an incomplete C-6 quadriplegic and a fulltime wheelchair user. I spent 9 months in a Rehab Hospital and during that stay I spent a lot of time thinking about how I would need to adapt to continue to get outdoors to enjoy my favorite sports.

At that time most Off-Highway Vehicles were less user friendly for people with limited mobility than they are today. But now many machines can be used with little or no modification, making them much easier and less expensive to use. Automotive style hand controls that have been used for years can easily be adapted for use on Recreational Off-Highway Vehicles (commonly called, Side by Sides). We have been able to introduce several of our wounded veterans who have suffered lower leg amputations to our sport with the help of this type of hand control modifications. It has long been a personal goal to establish a national program to introduce wounded veterans to the experience that off-highway vehicles can provide. Through NOHVCC and other organizations we hope to get such a program off the ground in the future.

One example of what an outreach group can accomplish is the Adaptive Sportsmen group located in Wisconsin. For the last 7 years they have held an annual 2-day ATV ride for people with disabilities in northern Wisconsin with 25 to 30 riders participating each year. This has been a very successful program. Several of the new riders being introduced to the sport at these rides have commented that learning from and riding with an experienced rider who also has a disability made it much more enjoyable.

I would like to share with you one ride in particular that stands out. It was a beautiful September day in Utah. As we were getting ready to leave Richfield, Utah on our ATVs another small group of riders stopped us and asked us for suggestions of trails they may enjoy riding that day. We invited them to join us on our ride. Our destination was Monroe Mountain. A more than 70mile ride that would take us through parts of the Fish Lake National Forest and the Richfield District of the BLM. Monroe Mountain is still one of my favorite places to visit. When we and our new friends arrived on the top of the 11,200 foot peak I told one of them that if she would like to talk to God it is a local call from up here. That particular day I did not take my wheelchair with me on my ATV. And it was not until that evening when we returned to Richfield and I got off my ATV that our new friends even released I had a disability. We had a pretty good laugh when one of them commented that I had just ridden over 70 miles and up over 11,000 feet without a problem and yet a 6 inch curb in the parking lot made me push my wheelchair over a ½ block out of my way to join them at the campfire.

I sometimes wonder that if being from Iowa where we have no Federal lands to enjoy and where 98% of our State is privately owned does not make me appreciate each of the Nation's public areas I have visited even more. I do know that without the opportunity to responsibly use my Off-Highway Vehicles on these Public Lands I could not have enjoyed them.

In closing, I ask you to please consider the access opportunities of the 54 million Americans with disabilities, our elderly and veterans in your decision on H.R. 1581 and any legislation that may address access for responsible Americans.

Thank You!