

Testimony of Dick Lepley
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
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Chairman Bishop, Ranking member Grijalva, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands...thank you for giving me the chance to testify regarding the positive economic impact of off-highway vehicle recreation.

As the owner of a forty-four year old dealership known as Street Track 'N Trail in Conneaut Lake, Pennsylvania, as an avid enthusiast, and as the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Off-Highway Vehicle Association, I've seen first-hand the incredible growth of OHV recreation, and the impact it can have on local and often rural economies.

The numbers speak for themselves, especially during these difficult times. In 2009 the estimated economic value of the off-road vehicle retail marketplace was \$14.6 billion dollars bolstered by the sale of 131,000 new off-highway motorcycles and 321,000 new ATV's which are now part of the estimated 12.2 million dirt bikes and ATV's in America.

My dealership employs fifty people, and during a good economy we generate nearly two-million dollars in payroll, and pay over two-million dollars in state and federal taxes yearly. There are 13,230 dealerships similar to mine nationwide, employing over 107,544 Americans with a payroll of over \$3.6 billion dollars. Clearly, the power sports industry contributes mightily to the nation's economy during both good times and bad, but regardless of the economy, nothing threatens dealerships and the industry at large like having no place to ride.

It's encouraging that you're holding this hearing today as it often seems like there is a never ending stream of special land designations, rules, regulations, and other efforts to limit OHV access to the lands that belong to all of us. Here in the East, we have far less access to public lands than folks in the West, but the struggle for trail miles is the same nationwide. For example, the one-hundred-eight mile motorized trail system in the Allegheny National Forest in western Pennsylvania has for decades been recognized as the model for doing it right. It has attracted thousands of riders, and generated millions of dollars for the regional economy. But instead of recognizing the growth potential, the ANF is putting its efforts into non-motorized recreation. I find this alarming for a number of reasons. For one, the ANF embraces over a half-million acres, but our one-hundred-eight miles of motorized trails occupy well under a tenth of a percent of the total forest. And, unlike other recreational disciplines on the ANF, we willingly pay to play every time we saddle up.

It has been years since I've struggled through an economy as challenging as the current one, and it is readily apparent that every job counts. If I could deliver just one message today it would be that OHV opportunities equal jobs. Where trail systems exist, the power sports industry and dealerships thrive, and local communities flourish.

This doesn't mean we don't have a commitment to our shared natural resources. I recognize there are special places across America that deserve protection, and that OHV's should not be allowed on every acre of public land. But, I believe there is room for all of us, and further, that responsible access to our public lands is the birthright of all Americans.

I don't expect you to shirk your duties to protect public lands, but instead to encourage you to consider the full impact that land use decisions have on Americans, including the revitalizing effect that building or expanding a trail system can have on local economies, and conversely, the negative impact that unnecessarily closing existing trails or preventing the addition of new ones can impose.

Local areas share a symbiotic relationship with the public lands that surround them. Residents are often dependent on the wages, recreation, and way of life public land offers, but so too is public land dependent on those who care for and watch over it. Simply putting up signs that say closed will not serve to protect our public lands. Instead, it will take active management, and a commitment from those whose livelihoods depend on the long-term health of our resources.

In closing, I want to reiterate the enormous impact the power sports industry has on the economy, and the positive effect that OHV trails have on the communities they serve, and to state once again, that sustainable OHV opportunities equal jobs. Thank you.