

Testimony of the
American Motorcyclist Association (AMA)
Vice President of Government Relations
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To the Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks
and Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
House of Representatives

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"Motorized Recreational Use on Federal Land"

U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Resources,
Subcommittee on National Parks
and
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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Edward Moreland. I am the Vice President of Government Relations for the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA), an organization representing over a quarter of a million individual dues-paying motorcycle enthusiast members. Established in 1924, the AMA was formed to pursue, promote and protect the rights of both on-highway and off-highway motorcyclists while addressing the specific needs of its members. The AMA appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony regarding "Motorized Recreational Use on Federal Land."

My purpose here today is to report on the current status, future needs and top priorities of off-highway motorcyclists, an important user of federal land within the recreation community. While the AMA recognizes that no single recreation type is appropriate for all public lands, there are many places where off-highway vehicle (OHV) use can exist in harmony with resource development and protection, cultural heritage protection and other recreational uses.

As cited by the U.S. Forest Service, nationwide there has been a sevenfold increase in the number of OHV owners and users in the last 30 years; from 5 million in 1972 to almost 36 million in 2000. In 2002, 11 million National Forest visits involved off-highway vehicle use.

We need a land management policy that reflects the needs of the growing motorized public and this must entail increased access for responsible motorized recreationists.

Access

With regards to access on federal lands by motorized users, the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are the two primary agencies for recreation opportunities. The AMA has worked proactively with both the Washington D. C. and field office staff of these two agencies and we look forward to continued cooperation and partnership among all parties.

We are especially encouraged by the BLM's recent willingness to listen to the needs of local motorized users and we hope that through increased communication we will see an expansion of access to BLM sites. Similarly, the Forest Service has done a good job of reaching out to the user community and partnering with a number of organizations to provide user education, safety training, restoration projects and management of OHV use.

I wish I could sit here and tell you how in the 1970's we had access to "x" amount of acres and in 2005 we have access to "y" amount of acres of our federal lands. Unfortunately I cannot give you those numbers, as we have not seen the agencies calculate them. Any number that you receive from outside groups will be estimation. What I can tell you, however, is that while ridership is on the rise, our access has been steadily declining over the last 20 years given the rise in wilderness and roadless designations. We hope that appearing in front of you today will help change this disturbing trend.

Forest Service Trail Designation Rule

The U.S. Forest Service has recently released a proposal to regulate OHV riding in all National Forests. The Forest Service is proposing a rule for designated routes and areas for motor vehicle use. The AMA supports this initiative because current regulations guiding the management of OHV's allow local land managers to restrict or prohibit off-highway vehicle use of national forest land, resulting in different rules at different forests.

While the AMA supports the use of designated routes to properly manage OHV use on public land, we are also concerned that land managers could use this proposal as an excuse to halt all riding during the designation process. It is imperative that the current system remains open until a full inventory has been completed.

Also, we have some concerns about how the agency will determine what routes and areas should be designated for OHV use, how the agency will pay for the work needed to map the routes and trails, and how early in the process the public can get involved in designating the routes. Designating routes in National Forests is a big job, and it's something that can't be rushed. Sacrificing accuracy for expediency is simply foolish and irresponsible. We support giving the Forest Service adequate time and resources to fully inventory all trails and roads.

Recreational Fee Program

The AMA supports the recent ten-year extension of the Recreational Fee Program (Rec. Fee). The AMA will continue to support Rec. Fee as long as the fees are equitable and aimed at recovering costs where services are provided. We believe the fee system must be efficient, costing the least amount practical to administer and fees should be convenient for the recreationist, so that voluntary compliance is readily achievable. Finally, the fee system should be coherent and integrated and the fees collected must be maintained and used at the site where the fee was generated.

The Recreational Fee Program has enormous potential to enhance opportunities for motorized recreation. In order to be most effective, the Forest Service must think boldly and implement a fee structure that efficiently accounts for its deferred maintenance needs, rewards land managers who work on those needs, and provides a positive experience for the user.

Recreational Trails Program

We all know that the annual appropriations process does not sufficiently address the increased usage and needed maintenance of today's trail system. This is why the AMA supported the creation of the Recreational Trail Program (RTP).

The RTP benefits motorized and non-motorized users by funding trail projects through a portion of the host state's gas tax revenues attributable to OHV use. So whenever one fills up the tank on an ATV or off-highway motorcycle, the tax dollars on each gallon of gasoline are put into the Highway Trust Fund through which the RTP receives its funding.

RTP funding is vital to the creation and maintenance of recreation trail opportunities for under-funded federal land management agencies, state governments faced with tightening budgets and local governments unable to make large investments. In some cases, trails simply would not exist if not for the infusion of RTP funds. Off-highway motorcyclists, all-terrain vehicle riders, snowmobilers, and four-wheel drive enthusiasts pay hundreds of millions of dollars into the highway trust fund each year and we are currently working to get-back a higher rate-of-return on those dollars. We look forward to seeing a substantial increase in RTP funds within this year's T-21 reauthorization.

Conclusion

The AMA looks forward to working with the Forest Service, BLM other federal agencies and Members of Congress in applying the best, most responsible access opportunities to the increasing number of motorized users on our federal lands. I thank the Chairmen and members of the subcommittees for their recognition and understanding of the specific needs of motorcyclists, all-terrain vehicle riders and other motorized users on our federal lands.