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Testimony
Before the Subcommittee on National Parks and
the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

Hearing on
"Motorized Recreational Use on Federal Lands"

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Mr. Chairman and honorable committee members, I am Jack Welch, the volunteer President of the BlueRibbon Coalition (BRC) based in Pocatello, Idaho. The BlueRibbon Coalition is a national recreation group that champions responsible use of public lands for the benefit of all recreationists by educating and empowering its members and encouraging individual environmental stewardship. It represents over 12,000 individual members and 1,200 organization and business members for a combined total of over 600,000 recreationists nationwide.

I am a native of Colorado and grew up in the Denver area. In the Colorado backcountry I have hiked, mountain biked and ridden snowmobiles ATVs, dirt bikes, four wheel drives, and personal watercraft on federal lands and waters for the last forty five years. Between 1977 and 1987 I served as Chairman of the Colorado Recreational Trails Committee. I was involved in the founding of the Colorado Snowmobile Association in 1970 and the Colorado Off Highway Vehicle Coalition in 1987.

I have has provided leadership in the effort to estbalish the Snowmobile and OHV registration programs in Colorado. These programs provide thousands of dollars to help the land managing agencies, along with volunteers to help with trail maintenance in the Colorado backcountry. On a national level I have worked to help create and fund the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). Orginally known as the Symms National Trails Act this program, now RTP, provides \$50 million dollars a year for all types of recreational trails and areas.

I have provided leadership for several national conferences on issues related to access to our federal lands. In the year 2000 I helped develop and conduct the first national "Recreation Capacity on Public Lands" conference in Snowmass, Colorado. I have worked closely with representatives of all the federal land managing agencies and have been invited to speak at several land managing workshops from coast to coast. I have helped develop several Memorandums of Understanding between BRC and other recreational groups and the Washington office of the USDA Forest Service and BLM. I have been invited to speak on public land access issues by the Society of Environmental Journalists, Colorado State Parks, and the Wyoming State Trails Program, just to mention a few.

I have been inducted into the International Snowmobile Hall of Fame, and received the Greenway Recreational Leadership award from the Governor of Colorado in 1988. I have served as BlueRibbon Coalition President for the last six years.

From BlueRibbon's point of view, the issue of "Motorized Recreational Use on Federal Lands" is very important. I am honored to provide testimony today.

First, as our country's population continues to increase, it brings an increase in the demand for outdoor recreation. Motorized/mechanical recreation demands far out paces the non-motorized/non-mechanical demands. In Colorado, ATVs and off highway dirt bike registrations have gone from 11,700 in 1990 to 100,000 units in 2005. Snowmobile registration have grown at a rate of 8% since the program started in 1970 and are at 38,000 machines in Colorado. The focus of 'motorized/mechanical' demand is not just traditional 'OHV' recreation (ATVs, dirt bikes, 4WDs, mtn. bikes, PWCs and snowmobiles), it must encompass a wide variety of demands including picnics, scenic drives, photography, rockhounding and several activities that depend on motorized/mechanical access to public lands. The loss of routes, campsites and just access does have a severe impact on the growing demand for public lands recreation, and is very important.

Second, motorized recreation is a great job creator and major force in many small communities. In Colorado, with over 138,000 registered ATVs, off highway motorcycles and snowmobiles and in the thousands of 4wd vehicles used off highway and approximately 12,000 PWCs, motorized recreation on federal lands is important. In fact, in 2000 a study of the Economic Contribution of Off Highway Vehicles concluded that the dollars generated equaled \$519,333,239 or approx half a billion dollars. This places Off Highway Vehicle recreation third in economic activity on Public Lands behind downhill skiing which is number one and Hunting and Fishing number two.

A snapshot of PWC economic value to Federal Waters is best illustrated by Lake Meade and Lake Powell National Recreation areas. Roxanne Dey, Lake Mead Public Information Office, recently stated that Lake Mead NRA has a 1 billion dollar economic impact on the local economy, and PWCs account for 30-35% of all boats launched there. At Lake Powell the recent EIS allowing PWCs back on the Lake reported that 980,000 visitor days were spent on Lake Powell using PWCs in the year 2000. And, in fact, the subcommittee on National Parks conducted a hearing in this very room in May that centered on the concern over the PWC access issue!

Third, in these troubled times OHV recreation provides families the opportunities to be together on our federal lands to recreate in a responsible manner. Just being away from the hustle and bustle of our daily lives help enhance our quality of life and renews our spirit!

And now some specific concerns that are influencing motorized recreational use of federal lands and waters:

The first issue is the fact that motorized recreational use on public lands and water never gets the same priority and resources that other areas of land management do. Land managers of these agencies always face reduced budgets and seldom find the resources to manage this important legitimate form of recreation. A clear example of not getting the required task finished on time comes from the settlement of the Park Service 2000 PWC rule legal action brought against the Park Service by the Blue Water Network. That settlement required the Park Service to complete EA and EIS on PWC use area within three years and it is still not completed 5 years later! These units include Big Thicket National Park (TX), Gateway National Recreation Area (NY/NJ), Curecanti National Recreation Area (CO), Cape Lookout National Seashore (NC), and Padre Island National Seashore (TX). In fact, here is an example of what families in the New York area who wanted to enjoy motorized access by PWC to their federal waters over 4th of July weekend faced!

The NPS published a final rule allowing the return of PWC to Fire Island National Seashore on 6 July. However, it was signed and dated by Paul Hoffman, Deputy Ass't Secretary of the Interior, on 24th of June. Why did it take 2 weeks to get published? In the meantime, the 4th of July holiday, the most popular boating day of the year, passed, and the public was not allowed to enjoy their PWC at Fire Island because of an arbitrary closure.

The second issue is another follow-up to a Subcommittee on National Park hearing in April of this year. Winter access to Yellowstone National Park was one of the topics. In addition to the snowmobile and snowcoach aspect of winter access there is a little known group of motorized recreationist who have enjoyed access to Jackson Lake in Grand Teton National Park to ice fish for over sixty years. This group of pioneers used snowplanes to access historical fishing sites on the Lake. In recent years their access which predates the establishment of Grand Teton Park, was eliminated without a formal NEPA process. Basically they were eliminated because of their small number and 120 families lost their historical access to their federal frozen waters!

Third is the Endangered Species Act (ESA) which my colleague, Roy Denner, from ORBA, has outlined today. I have several additional important examples of why this Act needs to be updated. In Colorado we have worked with all members of the winter backcountry community on the reintroduction of the Canada Lynx. This cat's reintroduction has the potential to effect all forms of winter recreation both motorized and non-motorized. In addition, Blue Ribbon has joined forces with other potentially effected parties to stop the listing of the Greater Sage Grouse. I would like to add, most experts agree that during the Act's 30 years of existence it has done a poor job of actually recovering threatened or endangered species, while effecting multiple use of our public lands!

On the positive side, motorized recreationalists contribute the entire funding source (gas taxes) for the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) which, in recent years, contributed \$50 million dollars that can be used to enhance both motorized and non-motorized recreation trails and areas on a state by state basis.. I have served on the Colorado State Recreational Trails committee and saw first hand the positive things RTP can do. However, this positive program on many occasions lacks the on-the-ground resources from the federal agencies, i.e. Forest Service and BLM, to use the dollars for both motorized and non-motorized projects. This concern needs to be addressed.

Another positive is the new OHV Management Rule that will be finalized soon. The Forest Service efforts to provide management of recreation and motorized summer recreation through the rule can be a positive step in the correct direction if the needed resources are provided to the Forest Service to conduct the on-the-ground inventory and route designation at the local level.

In closing, there are more people that are enjoying visiting our federal lands and water using motorized recreational equipment than at any other time in history. Our population is aging and yet access to important national treasures, like Yellowstone National Park by snowmobile, Lake Powell by personal watercraft, are continuously challenged in the courts

by groups that do not want to share our federal lands. These lawsuits must stop! The agencies must use good science to base their NEPA decisions.

In addition an area like Surprise Canyon in California is another example of a congressionally established 'cherry-stem' into a wilderness area that is being closed by an administrative process. I am sure that other examples can be found within the BLM and Forest Service.

The current "closed until posted open" mentality of the agencies locks things up tight and anti groups fight all of the opportunities for reopening. Tax paying, responsible Americans deserve to have appropriate access to their public lands. And, finally, the National Recreation Policy Act, yet to be introduced in Congress, will help establish the importance of recreational use of our public lands and waters for all forms of recreation.

Thanks you for your interest in my testimony today. Are there any questions?