

**RESOLUTION PASSED BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES IN JULY 2003  
REGARDING OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE MANAGEMENT ON PUBLIC LANDS**

Issue: Off-highway Vehicle Management

**Proposed Policy:** That the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior and the Chief of the Forest Service and the Director of Bureau of Land Management expedite the development of new travel policies and plans, as well as interim site specific plans, in conjunction with local governments and community based partnerships, that require Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) to stay on designated roads, trails or in limited off-road use areas. Sufficient resources should be available to local district offices to publish maps, place signs on routes, and to effectively monitor and manage off-highway vehicles in the areas that they are allowed.

**Background:** Over the past several decades, the growth in popularity and advances in all-terrain vehicle technology have resulted in increased resource impacts and user conflicts on public lands. Almost 36 million Americans own Off Highway Vehicles (OHV's). The range and ability of OHV to access remote public lands have placed demand on local search and rescue teams, helped to spread noxious and invasive weeds, have resulted in conflicts with other recreational users, ranchers, hunters, wildlife, and have caused environmental damage.

In an April 22, 2003 speech, Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth highlighted unmanaged off-road vehicle use as one of the four great issues facing forest lands. Chief Bosworth stated that "each year, we get hundreds of miles of what we euphemistically refer to as 'unplanned roads and trails. For example, the Lewis and Clark National Forest in Montana has more than a thousand unplanned roads and trails reaching for almost 650 miles. That's pretty typical for a lot of national forests, and its only going to get worse."The threats, he stated, are even more significant when one considers the role they play in spreading noxious and invasive weeds and fragmenting critical wildlife habitat - two of the other "great issues" the Chief described. Specifically, the Chief stated "We are going to have to manage that by restricting OHV use to designated roads, trails, and use areas".

In January 2001, the Bureau of Land Management publishes its National Management Strategy on Motorized Off-highway Vehicle (OHV) Use. This strategy suggested a local framework for reviewing and resolving motorized OHV issues, including improving consistency of management of OHV use, reducing conflicts and resource impacts and designating specific roads, trail and limited-use areas.

While both the Forest Service and BLM recognize the need to manage OHV use, the agencies have not implemented and funded a nation-wide policy to actively manage and monitor OHV use on public lands. Recreation is the fastest growing use of public lands and providing a quality recreation experience for all users, while protecting the resource, is important to local economies. It is time for these agencies to take an active management role in OHV use in collaboration with local government, local law enforcement and community groups.

A policy to require Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) to stay on designated roads and trails or in limited off-road use areas, and the allocation of sufficient resources to effectively monitor and enforce the public land travel plans support the policies of numerous other groups, including local law enforcement, hunting, hiking, biking, ranching groups, and is the position of OHV advocacy groups, such as the Blue Ribbon Coalition.

**Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Promoting better management of OHV use, reducing conflicts with other users, and minimizing the soil, watershed, wildlife and habitat impacts from OHVs will protect the health of our public lands while continuing to provide for recreational opportunities. Public lands are critical to the economy of the west. Motorized recreation poses one of the greatest threats to public lands, but active and effective management can minimize OHV impacts and protect the values of public lands for multiple use.