

Executive Summary

Recently the Chief of the USDA Forest Service (USFS) identified four major issues facing National Forests: fire and fuel, invasive species, habitat fragmentation, and unmanaged recreation. The Chief cited off-highway vehicle (OHV) use as illustrative of unmanaged recreation. OHVs are motorized vehicles capable of traveling off-road year-round and include OSVs (over snow vehicles).

OHV issues are complex and require research attention. Of particular interest are the perceptions of managers of OHV activity. They are most likely to understand the complex nature of OHV issues and to take the actions required for mitigating them.

A survey of 38 managers of OHV areas on National Forests in California was conducted. Managers, identified through an internal USFS mailing list, received questionnaires via email in advance of telephone interviews.

Size of OHV areas for which managers were responsible varied greatly. The areas had a median 0 miles of paved road open to non-highway legal OHV use, a median 271 miles of unpaved road open to non-highway legal OHV use, an average 43 miles of paved road closed to non-highway legal OHV use, and a median 36 miles of unpaved road closed to non-highway legal OHV use. The median number of OHV riders annually for these areas was 20,100. Respondents reported that most use occurred during the summer. About one-third reported the presence of concessionaires or nearby businesses that rented OHVs for use in their area.

Almost all managers reported that their forest plan has provisions for OHV trails and opportunities and most also had forest plans that considered the differences in use according to season. About half had completed surveys to show use patterns, documented impacts, or visitor impressions of OHV use.

Management problems were divided into those related to *natural resources*, *social institutions*, and *interpersonal relations*. In the *natural resources* classification the problems most frequently observed or reported were: soil erosion/trampling, soil erosion/compaction, litter/trash on roads and trails,

litter/trash at trail access points, vegetation damage, and graffiti or other vandalism. In the *social institutions* classification the problems most frequently observed or reported were: four-wheelers going off established roads or trails, OHVs going too fast, lack of safetywear, and alcohol use. No item in the *interpersonal relations* classification appeared in the top ten problems nor were any reported by more than one-quarter of the respondents.

Management strategies were categorized into those which *indirectly* impact recreation visitors, those which *directly* impact recreation visitors, *resource hardening*, and *bridge building or collaboration*. For four out of six management problems named by 50% or more of respondents, *bridge building* strategies were most frequently described as both “used most often” and “most effective.” For example, nine of 30 respondents identified *bridge building* strategies as “used most often” and 11 of 30 respondents identified *bridge building* strategies as “most effective” in mitigating soil erosion/trampling. *Direct* strategies followed in frequency.

Managers did not frequently identify conflict between recreational users, however, when conflicts were named, they most often occurred between OHV riders and hikers/backpackers, and between OHV riders and mountain bikers. These problems could be some of the most difficult to mitigate.

Of the *bridge building/collaboration* strategies described as “used most often” and “most effective,” the personal contacts strategy dominated. There are budgetary constraints to implementing a strategy of personal contacts namely funding, personnel, and training.