OUACHITA NATIONAL FOREST
Arkansas & Oklahoma

- 1.8 Million Acres in two states (AR & OK)
- Two separate and distinct state OHV laws
- One of three National Forests in Arkansas
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- Three National Forests, two different policies.
- Ouachita – open unless posted closed.
- Ozark – St. Francis – closed unless posted open.
• At one location, the Forests are separated by only five miles.
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• **OHV Planning Constraints:** Time, Distance & Communication.
• **Communications contract option explored.**
• **Contract developed, executed and managed in-house.**
• **Contract work was completed concurrent with plan revision activities.**
The Ouachita NF identified OHV use as a major plan revision issue.
The Chief identified unmanaged recreation (including OHV use) in the National Forests as one of the Four Threats to National Forest sustainability.
As part of Ouachita plan revision, the Forest set out to investigate and implement a management policy for OHVs.
• Selected local public relations firm knowledgeable of local affairs and “savvy” about user population expectations and desires.
Consultant developed comprehensive public involvement plan.
- Assisted with six public “Listening Post” meetings in draw area.
- Established goals/format for data gathering.
- Developed communication plan using free and paid media.
- Created exhibits/materials for use at meetings.
- Provided compiled results and analysis of gathered data.
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- 387 members of the public and local and state agencies attended the six “listening post” meetings. 46 groups, clubs and other organizations were represented at the meetings.

- A petition of 2.5K-OHV participant signatures was delivered to the Supervisor’s Office. 104 e-mails and 12-letters containing OHV comments were received. 403 user surveys were completed.
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• During the Forest’s OHV planning process we learned of a National OHV policy initiative.
• How to mesh our developing plan with the new Nationwide requirement?
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So, what did we learn?
• Typical User
  - Upper middle-aged male. Use by females, couples and families is increasing (20% of “Listening Post” attendance was female).
  - OHV used for pleasure riding and activities related to HUNTING!
  - User is protective of his “ownership” of the Forest.
• OHV use is a growing family activity with adults, children and less mobile older adults visiting the Forest together.

• During hunting season OHVs are used for direct hunting activities and related activities such as:
  ♦ Setting up and dismantling hunting camps.
  ♦ Large game retrieval.
  ♦ Scouting.
  ♦ Accessing favored hunting locations.
Some Needs to Consider:

- Firefighting access.
- Search & rescue.
- Timber scouting on adjacent, private lands.
- Administrative use.
- Resource management.
- Law enforcement.
Concerns to be addressed:

- Environmental impacts of unmanaged OHV use.
- Aging/disabled population access to the forest.
- Impacts to adjacent and in-held private property.
- Lack of OHV rider personal protective equipment.
- User defined Stream crossings.
- Local economies.
- Cultural expectations of local and visiting population.
OHV Users Are:

- Motivated, concerned and involved.
- Willing to purchase a permit and “license” sticker if funds are used to improve OHV facilities.
- Willing to aid in design, construction and maintenance of OHV trails.
- Self-policing, support managing “bad apple” behavior that may curtail Forest access to responsible users.
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How have we used this information?

• Draft Revised Forest Plan OHV policy moves OHV use from cross-country to designated routes and trails.

• Public education and interagency coordination - newsletters, posters, meetings, partner meetings, newspaper articles, etc.

• In development of Forest criteria for establishing OHV routes and trails.

• In the analysis on-going currently at District level to identify qualifying routes and trails.
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What’s To Come?

• After final Forest plan is approved, the District OHV route analysis will be compiled into potential routes and trails.

• Public working groups will be formed to review and comment on potential routes and trails. Routes and trails will be finalized.

• Route maps, user brochures, trail and route identification on the ground and a public education program will be implemented.