



# Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

## The Adventure Begins Where the Roads End

May 30, 2008

To: Sen. Jeff Bingaman, Chairman, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

Please enter the following into the record of the upcoming hearings on Off-Highway Vehicle management on our national forest and public lands.

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers is a national organization of outdoor enthusiasts who prize the tradition, challenge and solitude of America's backcountry. Founded around an Oregon campfire, we now have members in 43 states. BHA is a 501c3 non-profit organization that works to conserve big, natural habitat and healthy rivers and streams. We work so our kids and grandkids are free to enjoy the high-quality hunting and fishing we cherish.

We believe in access for all, yet understand that healthy wildlife habitat, rivers and streams are the foundation supporting the American pastimes of hunting and fishing. We believe there is a place for off-highway vehicle routes on public lands, but that greater controls and better enforcement are necessary in the face of growing human population and ever-more-powerful machines. In order to protect the future of hunting and fishing traditions we treasure, we want to protect large areas of public land completely separate from the noise, disturbance and pollution that comes with off-highway vehicles.

Our members — and many other Americans — are seriously impacted by irresponsible and excessive use of off road vehicles. Agency statistics show that motorized users are very much in the minority on public lands, yet they impact areas orders of magnitude larger than folks on foot or horse.

The latest National Forest Visitor Monitoring Report shows that only 5.6 % of visitors to National Forests go there to use an OHV. BLM reports they estimate only 9% of their visitors are there primarily to use an OHV.

The irony is that OHV users spoil hunting opportunity for themselves as well as for any quiet user within a mile or more of their noise. Extensive research over decades has established beyond dispute that OHVs impact a wide variety of wildlife and displace game animals. In addition, the use of motor vehicles shatters the quiet sense of solitude that traditional sportsmen seek.

Recent studies in the Madison Range in Montana show that hunters on OHVs drive elk from public land and onto private land, while hunters accessing similar areas on foot did not displace elk. The end result was public game driven off public land and onto private ranch land where average hunters are locked out.

All of our members tell a familiar story — working hard and playing by the rules, only to have illegal or inappropriate riders on OHVs shatter their experience, scare away the wildlife and damage the habitat. It's happening all across the country, over and over

again.

Several of our members are retired federal land managers. They feel strongly that irresponsible use of OHVs is out of control largely because of lack of agency direction, resolve and fortitude. Too many units of the BLM and Forest Service are hand wringing instead of acting. The Forest Service is working slowly to complete travel management planning but is neglecting authorities they already have (such as the Executive Orders) to implement emergency closures against off-route travel now.

We support reasonable controls to protect the water, forests and rangelands that are owned by all Americans. We support swift and effective enforcement of lawbreakers. We support meaningful penalties, such as confiscating machines and taking away hunting and fishing privileges of lawbreakers. Specifically we ask Congress to:

- direct the Agencies to aggressively accelerate controls, within the rules and resources they now have, of Off Highway Vehicles.
- secure necessary funding of OHV controls and enforcement on all public lands.
- investigate opening the Recreation Trail Program funds to for OHV management and Law enforcement.
- direct the Forest Service and BLM to declare large portions of America's forests, canyons and public land as completely off limits to the noise, disturbance and pollution of off-road vehicles, while providing some designated OHV routes where they will not harm public resources or damage the experience of others.

Sincerely

Mike Beagle, Chairman  
Back Country Hunters and Anglers  
Eagle Point, Ore.