

2025 Motorized Recreation Report

For BLM Managed Land in Alaska

Prepared for the US Bureau of Land Management



By

The National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council



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Executive Summary

The Bureau of Land Management in Alaska manages more surface and subsurface acres than any other state with BLM managed lands. This includes over 70 million surface acres and 220 million subsurface acres.

BLM Alaska manages the National Petroleum Reserve, the Steese National Conservation Area, the Iditarod National Historic Trail, and six Wild and Scenic Rivers. BLM Alaska also manages the agency's only National Recreation Area (NRA). Located just an hour's drive from Fairbanks, the 1-million-acre White Mountains NRA offers 12 public-use cabins, stunning scenery, peaceful solitude, and outstanding opportunities for year-round recreation.

Programs unique to Alaska include the Federal Subsistence Management Program, oversight of Trans-Alaska Pipeline System, and the Alaska Land Transfer Program—whereby federal lands are transferred through conveyances to Alaska Native Corporations, entitlement to the State of Alaska, and allotments to qualified individuals under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and amendments.

Outdoor recreation and access are extremely important to residents of Alaska. The 2023-2027 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan for the State of Alaska found that 99% of Alaska residents reported that they participate in some form of outdoor recreation. Alaska is tied with Montana for the highest percentage of residents participating in outdoor recreation. The 2019 study conducted by the Alaska Center for Economic Development estimated that in state customer spending related to outdoor recreation trips amounts to nearly \$3.2 billion annually. This spending alone created about 38,100 jobs in the State of Alaska. According to this report, one in every ten jobs in Alaska is tied to outdoor recreation.

It is important to note that activities such as subsistence hunting, berry picking, and general transportation are all items that fall under the umbrella of outdoor recreation for both the SCORP and this report. While these activities are not traditionally associated with recreation; they are vitally important to residents of Alaska and must be considered when discussing trails, trailhead facilities, and travel management in the state.

This report takes feedback from Alaska residents along with information researched like that above to identify opportunities to enhance outdoor recreation opportunities and access, specifically those tied to off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation in the State of Alaska.

Introduction

In 2014 NOHVCC and BLM partnered to develop a National Motorized Recreation Action Strategy designed to help the BLM develop individual state action plans for providing high quality OHV opportunities and develop partnerships to help maintain those opportunities. This process has created state specific OHV action plans in 8 other states where BLM manages public land. The strategies will be used to guide future travel management and resource management decisions; however, the strategies are NOT part of a specific travel management plan or resource management plan.

To accomplish this objective, BLM partnered with NOHVCC in creating action plans through a community driven process whereby enthusiasts can participate in an open forum. This unique approach provides a platform for candid discussion allowing the OHV community the ability to share ideas on how the BLM can enhance recreational experiences. The objectives of this process include achieving a greater understanding of existing and potential OHV opportunities, identifying priorities from enthusiasts, discussing methods to accomplish these goals by leveraging resources, and further developing inter-agency and community relationships through communication and action.

NOHVCC's role in this partnership is to facilitate a process whereby the OHV community is engaged in a dialogue that is driven by the public for the benefit of the public. Consequently, the recommended future management practices are specific to enhancing OHV trail systems and riding opportunities to include (but not limited to) repairing and developing current and new infrastructure, the design of new trail systems, new riding and staging areas, and improved communication between users, grassroots groups, and agencies.

Project Purpose

The development of an Alaska Motorized Recreation Action Plan will provide numerous benefits to BLM, its partners, and the public at large. It will provide for community efforts to plan for and manage motorized recreation opportunities, services, and facilities. The strategic planning process will assist BLM by prioritizing motorized recreation areas and leveraging resources through community partners to ensure that high-priority sites, services, and activities are provided.

To achieve consistent motorized recreation management on a national scale NOHVCC believes that it is necessary to utilize a step-down approach. This method will reduce expenses and allocate joint funding directly to projects. The BLM Alaska State Office has been provided an opportunity to coordinate this effort with NOHVCC and existing State OHV organizations to gather information from local communities, motorized organizations, and individual motorized recreationists. The information gathered can then be used to inform planning processes and help create a dialog between motorized recreationists, local communities, and OHV managers. This will lead to better relationships and partnerships that will result in lasting solutions that benefit riders, local communities, and the land management agencies.

NOHVCC worked with BLM and local stakeholders to organize and facilitate a series of community workshops (i.e., listening sessions) designed to gather information from the motorized recreation community. Workshop sites were located in populated areas in Alaska that housed BLM District Offices. Because of the size of the State of Alaska, and the remoteness of some of the BLM managed lands in Alaska, not all meetings were held near the lands where OHV recreation takes place. NOHVCC also reached out to motorized recreation associations and clubs to identify key community motorized

organizations and individuals to participate in the workshops. Because of the relatively small population of Alaska these groups were not as prevalent as they were in other states where this process has been conducted.

This report is the outcome of the workshops and will be shared with BLM and the public. The information contained in this report will be used to help land managers, NOHVCC, and the public achieve the following objectives:

- Provide high-quality OHV opportunities and experiences that meet the needs of motorized users and result in enhanced resource protection
- Develop riding opportunities within the urban interface (i.e., close-to-town settings)
- Identify current motorized recreation opportunities on BLM managed lands and develop ideas on how to improve these opportunities
- Identify potential opportunities on BLM managed lands
- Identify methods to inform the public on responsible use
- Inform the public on the decision-making process regarding motorized recreation
- Inform the public how they can best become effective participants in planning processes
- Help provide for seamless management between agencies
- Gain a better understanding of motorized recreationists' needs
- Develop partnerships that result in high-quality recreational opportunities
- Develop a report and spreadsheet and/or GIS data to indicate this information
- Gain better information to integrate into agency planning documents
- Create and enhance partnerships to better manage motorized recreation opportunities and experiences
- Enhance motorized recreation opportunities to help local economies
- Stress the importance of motorized routes in subsistence and transportation to Alaska residents and how important these activities are to the Alaska way of life.

To enhance user opportunities and experiences, it is imperative to understand the needs of riders. Riding areas and trails should be designed to meet the riders' needs, provide desired opportunities, and offer quality experiences. Riding areas that do not meet riders' needs will not be used or supported. Riders desire trails that include some or all of the following: fun, varying degrees of challenge, signing, trail maps, trail loops, distance, scenery, destinations, points of interest, open areas, camping, parking, and amenities. Once specific desires are recognized, land managers can make informed decisions on the types of motorized recreation needs of local users. User needs and desires can vary, so riding opportunities must be managed accordingly to ensure resource protection and sustainability for many years to come. Motorized recreation enthusiasts can desire activities as diverse as recreational trail riding, non-competitive organized trail riding, competitive activities, observed trials, motocross tracks for

practice and competition, hill climbs for practice and competition, obstacle courses, open areas and more. To learn more about these types of uses please refer to “*Great Trails: Providing Quality OHV Trails and Experiences*” written by Dick Dufourd in association with NOHVCC in 2015.

Demographics of OHV Users

Note: These figures represent the most recently available figures and do not accurately capture the increase in outdoor and OHV recreation witnessed in 2020.

To better understand what OHV enthusiasts, want, you must first know who these enthusiasts are. The findings of a 2014 Motorcycle Industry Council (MIC) survey of motorcycle and ATV owners are below. Since the side-by-side industry is still relatively new, statistics are not available for this type of OHV recreation.

Demographics	Motorcycle	ATV
Mean Age	44.8 Years	40.3 Years
Median Age	47 Years	39 Years
Male	86%	82%
Female	14%	18%
Single	38%	40%
Married	61%	59%
Some College	29%	27%
College Graduate	20%	19%
Postgraduate	23%	17%
Employed	71%	67%
Students	5%	10%
Retired	15%	11%
Median Household Income	\$62,200	\$63,400
Owners Have Children Under 16	31%	38%

ATV and motorcycle riders are similar in many ways. The average rider is in his or her forties, married with a family, and is employed with disposable income. ATV and motorcycle owners earned about \$10,000 more than the US national median income of \$52,500 in 2014. ATV and motorcycle riders generally start young and are surrounded by people who have a positive view of OHV recreation. Some other quick facts about ATV and motorcycle riders in the US include:

- Most motorcycle riders begin riding off-highway in their preteens around the age of 12
- 66% of motorcycle owners indicated their family/friends had a positive attitude towards their interest in motorcycling; only 5% had a negative attitude
- 83% of ATV owners indicated their family/friends had a positive attitude toward their interest in ATV's; only 10% had a negative attitude
- 39% of motorcycle owners participate in hiking and camping; 34% participate in hunting and fishing
- 50% of ATV owners participate in hiking and camping; 58% participate in hunting and fishing
- 53% of off-highway motorcycle operation is on public land in the Western United States

Powersports dealers indicate the average OHV owner uses ATVs and side-by-sides for more than recreational use. These machines are versatile and provide users with the option to use the equipment for both work and play. OHVs (ATVs and side-by-sides in particular) are highly capable machines in both work and recreation settings. Finally, a thriving aftermarket provides myriad accessories that allow for extensive customization to an individual owner's priorities.

Alaska Recreation Statistics

Alaska residents report the highest participation in the nation (tied with Montana). According to the Alaska Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 99% of Alaska residents participate in some form of outdoor recreation. The highest rated purely recreational activity according to participation is to visit public parks and picnic areas with 52% of Alaska participating in this activity. 16.9% of Alaskan residents reportedly participate in 4x4 or OHV activities, however it is important to note that 79.6% of Alaskans participate in fishing; 77.7% participate in berry picking, gathering plants, and gathering firewood; and 21.2% participate in hunting. According to NOHVCC's interactions with residents many people use an OHV as part of the subsistence activities mentioned above.

Reporting Process

To develop a Motorized Recreation Report for Alaska this project was divided into several phases:

- Phase I: Interview land managers in each Field Office across the state. Conduct research and compile information regarding current OHV riding areas, facilities, trail infrastructure, and any other relevant information.
- Phase II: Facilitate three in-person public listening sessions across Alaska, and two additional virtual sessions.
 - Engage OHV enthusiasts in an open dialogue to address five specific questions on riding location, types of OHVs used to participate in activity, identify potential/new locations, improvements that need to be made to enhance rider experience. Gather all comments and feedback from participants then have the group prioritize their top three recommendations.

- Phase III: Compile comments and feedback, and develop tables to display acreages, OHV riding areas and current infrastructure.
- Phase IV: Develop final report to convey the priorities as outlined by the enthusiasts that recreate in Alaska, summarize priorities, and make final recommendations for the Action Plan.

Community Workshops

NOHVCC reached out to partnering organizations, NOHVCC State Partners, the State of Alaska, the BLM Alaska Travel Management Lead, and state and regional OHV clubs notifying them of the Alaska OHV Recreation Action Plan and to garner support for the initiative. The intent was to invite the OHV community to participate in the workshops and share their thoughts on how land managers can enhance recreational experience on public lands. In person listening sessions were held in Fairbanks, Glennallen, and Anchorage in November of 2024. Because of the large size of Alaska and how remote some towns, villages, and BLM managed lands can be, two additional virtual listening sessions were held in December of 2024. Comments were accepted in person during the listening sessions or by e-mail until December 20th, 2024.

Listening Session Location	Date	Number of Participants	Participating Organizations and Representatives
Fairbanks	11/4/24	3	Alaska Enduro, General Outdoor Recreation
Glennallen	11/5/24	8	BLM, AK Backcountry Freeriders, General Outdoor Recreation
Anchorage	11/6/24	10	BLM, AK Backcountry Freeriders, General Outdoor Recreation
Virtual Session	12/3/24	8	Big Lake Trails Association, Alaska Snowmobile Club, Anchorage Snowmachine Club, Alaska Outdoor Council, Snomads,
Virtual Session	12/4/24	11	Anchorage Snowmobile Club, Denali Highways Trail Club, Alaska Snowmobile Club, Alaska Snowmobile Association, Anchorage Snowmachine Club, Alaska Backcountry Access, Alaska Snowmobile,
	Total	40	

Comments and Feedback

The workshops opened with an overview of the OHV Action Plan process for Alaska, including the objectives and outcomes of the community workshop process. It was emphasized during this time that this process was not a substitute for participating in agency planning. Participants were encouraged to stay engaged in their local processes.

The second part of the workshops focused on engaging participants in a group discussion pertaining to how the land managers could enhance user experience on public lands. The participants were divided into groups and each participant was given an opportunity to fill out a comment form. The following questions were asked of workshop participants:

- Where do you ride on BLM managed lands in Alaska? (Area and/or Trail)

- What OHVs do you ride in this area/trail?
- Location: (Area/Trail)
- Type of OHV:
- What are your favorite features in this area/trail?
- What improvements/experiences are you looking for in this area?
- Where might these improvements/experiences fit on public land in Alaska?
- What could the BLM do better to enhance your OHV recreation experience?

After each participant answered the above questions, they were asked to discuss with the entire group how they felt the BLM could best enhance their OHV recreation experience. The facilitators captured this feedback and kept a record of comments as well as common themes. A detailed record of individual comments may be found in the Appendix.

Workshop Priorities

The table below lists priorities indicated by the groups during each listening session and are separated by listening session location. Listening session priorities are not listed in any particular order.

Fairbanks, AK Priorities-NOHVCC Listening Sessions	
<u>Priority</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	No restrictions to access or trails
2	Improve Parking
3	Unify weight restrictions across all management agencies
Glennallen, AK Priorities-NOHVCC Listening Sessions	
<u>Priority</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	Protect utilitarian uses and access (Hunting, berry picking, fishing, etc.)
2	Maps: improved and easier to access
3	Signage on all trails and better marking of land management boundaries
4	More trails should be opened to multiple use
5	Increased trail maintenance
6	Increased trail connectivity
Anchorage, AK Priorities-NOHVCC Listening Sessions	

<u>Priority</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	Improved and increased signage
2	Improved management and notification of boundaries between
3	Weight regulations of OHVs need to be constant across all management agencies
Virtual Listening Session #1-NOHVCC Listening Sessions	
<u>Priority</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	No new regulations created as a part of this process
2	The importance of subsistence use on trails in Alaska
3	Consider connecting Cordova to Kennecott by trail
4	Identify methods to protect trail signs
Virtual Listening Session #2-NOHVCC Listening Sessions	
<u>Priority</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	No comments collected in person

Bureau of Land Management: Alaska OHV Recreation Needs and Opportunities

As stated above, the BLM manages over 70 million surface acres in the State of Alaska. The management is split up amongst the State Office and three different District Offices. The District Offices are the Anchorage District Office, the Arctic District Office, and the Fairbanks District Office. These district offices are broken down further into Field Office locations. Within the Anchorage District Office, you can find the Anchorage Field Office, the Glennallen Field Office, the Nome Field Station, and the Campbell Creek Science Center. Within the Arctic District Office, you can find Barrow Field Station. Within the Fairbanks District Office, you can find the Central Yukon Field Office and the Eastern Interior Field Office.

General comments for BLM Alaska

- Access for machines larger than 1500 lbs. needs to be created
- Shooting safety needs to be addressed in some locations
- Property lines and jurisdictional boundaries need to be marked
- Routes for recreation and routes for utilitarian use should be classified and managed independently of each other

- These sessions should not be used to justify new policies for future development
- There is a need for increased communication between the BLM and the public
- We would like to see an increase in the number of multiple use trails/access in Alaska with experiences for motorized, nonmotorized, boats, 4-wheel drive, and self-propelled
- Provide better information about what motorized recreation opportunities are available on BLM managed lands in Alaska. Disperse at chamber of commerce buildings, visitors' centers, etc.
- Improve signing and parking areas at 17b easements
- 17b trail development
- Provide better maps at trailheads
- Improve upkeep on existing campgrounds, trails, and facilities
- Improve side-by-side access. The current size restrictions are not in line with state land regulations. These restrictions limit many users and cut off access to state land

Specific comments provided by listening session participants:

Anchorage District Office

- Anchorage Field Office
 - N/A
- Glennallen Field Office
 - Create a trail that connects Cordova to Kennecott Mine, this may require cross-jurisdictional coordination
 - Haggard Creek Trail and Middle Fork Trail need stabilization they are wet and difficult to travel
 - Many areas in the Mat Su Borough are off the road system; especially, in areas past Big Lake, Willow, Talkeetna and Trapper Creek. A trail is the only access to reach a cabin or home in the Mat Su Borough. The Mat Su Borough is a gateway to rural communities. A recreational trail for hiking should never override a trail that is used for transportation with an off-road vehicle. For many people a motorized trail is a lifeline to haul supplies, food and water to remote locations. You wouldn't want recreational hikers to cut off access to your home, so why do it to others?
 -
- Nome Field Station
 - N/A
- Campbell Creek Science Center
 - N/A

Arctic District Office

- N/A

Fairbanks District Office

- Central Yukon Field Office
 - N/A
- Eastern Interior Field Office

- N/A

NOHVCC Recommendations for BLM Alaska

1. Consider the opportunities for subsistence hunting/gathering and regular transportation that BLM managed trails and lands provide to Alaska residents: While NOHVCC understands that this is already a consideration for BLM planners, this was perhaps the biggest concern shared by the public. Changes to route systems may create barriers to utilitarian use or normal transportation to remote villages. These routes are extremely important to Alaskan residents.
2. Seek a balance between developed facilities and Alaska's natural ruggedness and beauty. Comments from the public were evenly divided amongst those who wish to see developed trailheads, trail signage, and facilities; and those who seek to preserve a more natural trail and environmental setting. Examine which locations are suitable for development and which locations are not. Perhaps locations near populated areas could be more developed where more remote areas can remain more primitive.
3. Work with other land managers and policy managers to determine if a consistent limit for machine weight can be achieved. This is another common complaint from the public. Different weight restrictions based on land managers are confusing and hard to track, especially when land management boundaries are not well marked or understood.
4. Work with other land managers to determine if a system for notifying the public of land management boundaries can be developed. Most people want to do the right thing, but it can be difficult to understand when jurisdictional boundaries change on the ground. This could come with an entirely different set of regulations, so it is vital for the public to understand when they cross into another agency's jurisdiction.
5. Create useable and easy to access maps. If these have already been created where travel management is in place, educate the public on where and how they can be accessed.
6. Improved signage: This is another common concern for the public. Because of the size of the state and the land managed by the BLM this can be quite a challenge. Consider working with local enthusiast groups to install and maintain signs.
7. The BLM desires better communication with the public. If the OHV enthusiasts can provide consistent contact information or designate a group or individual to help spread information about projects, volunteer days, or other important individuals' communication can improve between the agency and the public.

BLM Staff Recommendations for BLM Alaska

Anchorage District Office

- Anchorage Field Office
 - Secure up to date and accurate route and facility inventory
 - Organize volunteer efforts near small and remote villages
 - Discuss interest of partners in creating friends' group or other partnerships to facilitate local projects
 - Determine need for kiosks, barriers, trail maintenance program, etc. based on finalized inventory.

- Glennallen Field Office
 - Develop strategies for encouraging volunteerism in remote locations on a routine basis
 - Analyze potential for creating trail system at Coal Mine Road
 - Analyze potential for creating a campground at Coal Mine Road
 - Develop trail maintenance program
 - Install vault toilets at higher use trailheads
 - Install barriers to block non-designated routes

Arctic District Office

- N/A

Fairbanks District Office

- Convert user created routes to sustainable and managed routes
- Potentially install campground in the Steese NCA
- Determine need for officially designated parking or trailheads with developed facilities
- Edit and implement a sign plan for the White Mountains NRA.
- Update kiosks at the White Mountains NRA trailheads to include up to date information which includes maps and current restrictions

Conclusion

Alaska is an extremely large and beautiful state. The sheer size and remoteness of many parts of the state create management challenges, but also present opportunities for scenic and unique trail systems. The utilitarian needs of Alaskan residents make management more complex, as routes do not only serve the recreating public, but these uses are amongst the most important to many Alaska residents. That is not to say that there are not recreational priorities for Alaskans who recreate with OHVs, but there must be a balance between the uses when planning and prioritizing resources. Throughout this process NOHVCC has engaged many people that place high importance on quality access and routes to areas where they hunt, fish, pick berries, and just enjoy the natural beauty. NOHVCC hopes that this process has introduced BLM to many of these individuals so that they can work with the public to achieve common goals and outcomes.

About NOHVCC

The National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC), as a national body of OHV recreation enthusiasts, develops and provides a wide spectrum of programs, materials and information, or “tools”, to individuals, clubs, associations, and agencies to further a positive future for responsible OHV recreation. NOHVCC is a 501(c)3 education non-profit organization. The organization is not a membership organization, but a partnership organization with volunteer State Partners in nearly every State. The organization partners with the Canadian Off-Highway Vehicle Distributors Council, the Canadian Quad Council, and the Motorcyclists Confederation of Canada. In addition to these enthusiast partnerships, NOHVCC has partnerships with government agencies such as the USDA Forest Service, the USDI Bureau of Land Management, the Federal Highway Administration, plus state and local agencies. NOHVCC’s goal is simply to provide “A Positive Future for OHV Recreation.”

Project Team

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References

BLM National Management Strategy for Motorized Off Highway Vehicle Use on Public Lands (2001)

BLM Blueprint for 21st Century Outdoor Recreation

BLM National Recreation Strategy: Connecting with Communities (2014-2019)

BLM National Motorized Recreation Action Plan (2014)

BLM Alaska <https://www.blm.gov/alaska>, accessed on 12/9/24

Great Trails: A Guide to Providing Quality OHV Trail Experiences (2015)

Management Guidelines for OHV Recreation by Tom Crimmins in Association with NOHVCC (2006)

Motorcycle Industry Council 2014 Motorcycle/ATV Owner Survey

Alaska 2023-2027 SCORP, <https://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/scorp.htm>, accessed on 12/9/24

Attachments

National Motorized Recreation Strategy

Sample Comment Form

*Listening session participant comment forms available upon request