

Alaska Statewide Motorized Recreation Action Plan



Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) completed a National Management Strategy for Motorized Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use on Public Lands in 2001. This document provided guidance to BLM field offices using input from various interest groups and individuals and provided techniques on how to address motorized recreation use. It also addressed multiple OHV-specific issues, identified subsequent management goals, and established action items to address these emerging issues.

Although BLM still utilizes the 2001 Strategy, trail design, construction, and maintenance techniques have evolved significantly over the past two decades. This is in reaction to rapidly evolving OHV technology and increasing ridership. BLM has attempted to keep up with these changes while simultaneously managing potential impacts and providing high-quality visitor opportunities and experiences. However, the BLM generally relies on existing guidance that often fails to include experience and outcome-based trail design guidelines for motorized recreation. In response to this, BLM now works more closely with the communities we serve, and our national, state and local partners to establish sustainable motorized recreation management guidelines based on desired visitor experiences, landscapes, trail types, and difficulty levels.

In 2014, BLM released an updated National Recreation Strategy - Connecting with Communities. This strategy further develops BLM's successful recreation and visitor services program and provides effective tools for creating and enhancing various partnerships and establishing closer ties with communities. In addition to this updated strategy, in 2015 the BLM collaborated with the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC) to develop and release a National Motorized Recreation Action Plan, which stated that BLM would work to develop Motorized Recreation Action Plans for each state where BLM has significant management responsibilities. Thus far, Action Plans have been completed for BLM Montana, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Oregon/Washington, Colorado, Idaho, and California.

To accomplish this objective, BLM partnered with NOHVCC to create 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 progressive 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.

Motorized Recreation on Public Lands in Alaska

Alaska residents report the highest outdoor recreation 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.

Action Plan for Motorized Recreation on Public Lands in Alaska

Purpose

This Alaska Statewide Motorized Recreation Action Plan will build on, and complement, the direction that was identified in the 2001 BLM National Motorized OHV Strategy and the 2015 BLM National Motorized Recreation Action Plan. It will accomplish this by providing state-level, community-driven, direction to better plan for, and manage, motorized recreation uses on BLM-managed lands in Alaska.

Goals

The goals of the Alaska Motorized Recreation Action Plan are to:

- Strategically leverage partners, community and state/local government resources
- Improve agency capacity and expertise
- Improve communication with the recreating public (provide accurate maps, web information, signs, etc.)

Process

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

- Phase I: Interview land managers in each BLM 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, and two on-line, public listening sessions across Alaska
 - 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 the 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.

Recommendations

As a result of NOHVCC's in-person and on-line listening sessions, the following recommendations were developed to better manage public motorized recreation areas in Alaska:

1. Consider the opportunities for subsistence hunting/gathering and regular transportation that BLM-managed trails and lands provide to Alaska residents. NOHVCC understands that this is already a consideration for BLM planners, however this was perhaps the biggest concern shared by the public. Changes to route systems may create barriers to utilitarian uses or general 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 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 is confusing and hard to track, especially when land management boundaries are not well marked or understood.

4. Work with other local, state, and national 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 easily 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 user groups to inventory, install and maintain signs.

Alaska Priority Motorized Recreation Areas and Action Items

High quality recreational outcomes are dependent on well-planned trail systems, adequate facilities, and the ability to adapt to emerging technologies and information. Well-managed motorized recreation areas have a much higher capacity to accommodate this type of use. Through public and agency input, a list of areas where motorized recreation is being actively managed, and improvements can be realistically made, was created. These areas and proposed suggested action items are depicted in Table 1 (see below).

Table 1. Action Items for Existing/Priority Motorized Recreation Areas on BLM Managed Lands in Alaska

BLM District/Field Office OHV Area Designations (Acres)	BLM Area Name/Acres Travel Route Designations (Miles)	Allowable OHV Uses	Existing Facilities	Action Plan Items Resource Management Plan (RMP) Conformance Travel Management Plan (TMP) Conformance
Anchorage District Anchorage Field Office Open: 0 Limited: 11.9 million Closed: 0 Total Acres: 11.9 million	Kobuk/Seward Peninsula 11.9 million acres Open: 0 Limited: 2200 miles of existing travel routes Closed: 0 miles	Consult Kobuk/Seward Peninsula RMP	None	<u>Action Items (Prior to RMP/TMP/RAMP Plan Completion):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create Friends Group for OHV Area • Organize Volunteer Efforts • Complete Route Inventory • Solicit public assistance in completing route/trail inventory <u>Action Items (Post RMP/TMP/RAMP Plan Completion)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize Route/Trail System • Develop Trail Maintenance Program • Create Sign plan
Anchorage District Anchorage Field Office Open: 0 Limited: 1,975,966 Closed: 0 Total Acres: 1,975,966	Bay RMP 1,975,966 acres Open: 0 Limited: Unknown Closed: 0	Consult Bay RMP	None	<u>Action Items (Prior to RMP/TMP/RAMP Plan Completion):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create Friends Group for OHV Area • Organize Volunteer Efforts • Complete Route Inventory • Solicit public assistance in completing route/trail inventory <u>Action Items (Post RMP/TMP/RAMP Plan Completion)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize Route/Trail System • Develop Trail Maintenance Program • Create Sign plan

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Anchorage District Anchorage Field Office Open: 0 Limited: 13.5 million Closed: 0 Total Acres: 400	Bering Sea Western Interior 13.5 million acres Open: N/A Limited: 4500 Closed: N/A	Consult Bering Sea Western Interior RMP	None	<u>Action Items (Prior to RMP/TMP/RAMP Plan Completion):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create Friends Group for OHV Area • Organize Volunteer Efforts • Complete Route Inventory • Solicit public assistance in completing route/trail inventory <u>Action Items (Post RMP/TMP/RAMP Plan Completion)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize Route/Trail System • Develop Trail Maintenance Program • Create Sign plan >Do Action Items Conform to RMP? Yes >Do Action Items Conform to TMP? Yes
Anchorage District Anchorage Field Office Open: 0 Limited: 1.3 million Closed: 0 Total Acres: 1.3 million	Ring of Fire RMP 1.3 million acres Open: 0 Limited: N/A Closed: 0	Consult Ring of Fire RMP	None	<u>Action Items (Prior to RMP/TMP/RAMP Plan Completion):</u> <u>Action Items (Post RMP/TMP/RAMP Plan Completion)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize volunteer efforts >Do Action Items Conform to RMP? Yes >Do Action Items Conform to TMP? Yes

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<p>Anchorage District</p> <p>Glennallen Field Office</p> <p>Open: 0</p> <p>Limited: 7 million</p> <p>Closed: 0</p> <p>Total Acres: 7 million</p>	<p>East Alaska RMP/Ring of Fire RMP</p> <p>7,150,000 acres</p> <p>Open: 0</p> <p>Limited: 551 miles of designated routes</p> <p>Closed: 0</p>	<p>East: 44,000 acres closed to winter use including snowmachines; 100,000 acres limited to designated trails during summer, TLAD allows for cross country travel with 12 inches of snow or 6 inches of ground frost</p> <p>Ring of Fire: Limited to existing or designated routes, allow for cross country travel with 12 inches of snow or 6 inches of ground frost</p>	<p>28 trailheads, registration stands,</p> <p>1 loading ramp</p> <p>3 restrooms</p> <p>4 trailheads within TLAD have travel management signage</p>	<p><u>Action Items (Prior to RMP/TMP/RAMP Plan Completion):</u></p> <p><u>Action Items (Post RMP/TMP/RAMP Plan Completion)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create Trail Maintenance Program • Install vault toilets at higher use trailheads • Install barriers for non-designated routes • Assess the feasibility of creating a trail that connects Cordova to Kennecott Mine • Stabilize/reroute the Haggard Creek and Middle Fork Trail • Provide access trails to homeowners in Mat Su Borough <p>>Do Action Items Conform to RMP? Yes</p> <p>>Do Action Items Conform to TMP? Yes</p>

BLM District/Field Office OHV Area Designations (Acres)	BLM Area Name/Acres Travel Route Designations (Miles)	Allowable OHV Uses	Existing Facilities	Action Plan Items Resource Management Plan (RMP) Conformance Travel Management Plan (TMP) Conformance
Fairbanks District Eastern Interior Field Office Open: 0 Limited: 1,020,000 Closed: 0 Total Acres: 1,208,650	White Mountains National Recreation Area 1,000,000 acres Open: 0 Limited: 290 miles of designated routes Closed: 0 miles	Open to motorcycles, ATVs, ROVs, & 4x4s, Winter and summer seasons have their own restrictions and these include weight, size, and calendar dates	Parking Areas-8, Restrooms-29, Picnic Tables-45, Fire Rings-45, loading ramps-5, kiosks-10, cabins-13	<u>Action Items (Prior to RMP/TMP/RAMP Plan Completion):</u> <u>Action Items (Post RMP/TMP/RAMP Plan Completion)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the 2022 TMP • Install loading ramp at Wickersham Dome Trailhead >Do Action Items Conform to RMP? Yes >Do Action Items Conform to TMP? Yes
Fairbanks District/Eastern Interior Field Office Open: 0 Limited: 1.2 million Closed: 0	Steese National Conservation Area 1.2 million acres Open: 0 Limited: 193 miles of designated routes for motorized summer use Closed: 0	Open to motorcycles, ATVs, ROVs, & 4X4s	5 waysides (30 acres) 15-20 miles from Steese, located on State Lands, 5 restrooms No camping 3 picnic tables Sign boards at each wayside Entrance to Steese NCA have OHV regulatory messaging signs Have paper maps currently available	<u>Action Items (Prior to RMP/TMP/RAMP Plan Completion):</u> <u>Action Items (Post RMP/TMP/RAMP Plan Completion)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install Campground • Install Kiosks • Transform user created trails into sustainable trails >Do Action Items Conform to RMP? Yes >Do Action Items Conform to TMP? Yes

Successful Implementation

Through national, state, and local partnerships, there is a unique opportunity to provide outstanding OHV recreation opportunities and experiences on BLM-managed lands in Alaska by implementing the action items described in Table 1. To successfully apply the action items depicted in table 1 and the guidelines listed below, visitor needs and desires should first be considered to ensure they are tailored to each local situation. It is important to identify who the potential visitors are, and will be, and how land managers can best serve them. Existing and potential visitors should be engaged early to help land managers understand what recreational opportunities and experiences are desired, as well as what facilities may be needed. Each of the following guidelines are essential to the successful development and management of outstanding and sustainable motorized recreation solutions for Alaska enthusiasts.

Engineering

- Design trails to meet the desired recreation experience, provide enjoyment, and limit negative behavior
- Prepare professional designs and standards for quality and safety
- Limit impacts to resources that could be impacted through sustainable design (Vegetation loss – user created trails, Soil erosion, Air Quality, Water Quality, Wildlife Habitat)

Education - Visitor's need to know/have:

- What to expect during their visit
- Vehicle restrictions
- Unique information about the area
- Behaviors that are appropriate
- What the rules and safety guidelines are and why they are in place
- How to get more information
- Maps
- Signs & Information kiosks
- Occasional staff or volunteer contact

Enforcement

- Regular, positive staff presence leads to good management and improved safety
- Enforce local, State, and Federal rules and regulations
- Use enforcement as an education tool when necessary

Evaluation

- Identify and address problems early
- Identify risks and accident conditions, then find solutions or change the facility
- Monitor conditions and changes in visitation and resource impacts
- Identify trail management objectives for proper maintenance
- Ask visitors what they do and do not like
- Ask if the area is being properly managed per City, State and Federal laws
- Adaptively manage to correct problems and improve visitor experiences and safety

Leveraging

The Alaska Motorized Recreation Action Plan project is a great example of how the leveraging of resources (funding and labor) can be maximized through partnerships. Through BLM's partnership with NOHVCC, it is expected that, for every \$1.00 the BLM expends on the action items listed for this project, an estimated return of \$2.50 will be obtained. As local relationships between the BLM and members of the public continue to grow and improve, and local users become more involved in helping BLM implement specific action items, this number is expected to multiply significantly. As an example, the Pipestone project in Montana (the model for this type of motorized recreation partnership leveraging), is seeing a 500% return on its original investment. As the project becomes more focused and continues to gain momentum, this number is expected to increase.

Conclusion

The motorized recreation community recognizes that some high-quality opportunities and experiences are currently available on public lands in Alaska. However, increasing demand for sustainable, high-quality recreation opportunities already exceeds the capacity of the public land managers to adequately provide and manage for. This Alaska Motorized Recreation Action Plan draws on the expertise and enthusiasm of many local users and stakeholders in nearby communities who are willing to partner with land managers to increase both the quality, and quantity, of motorized recreation opportunities and experiences on public lands in Alaska.

The benefits of this project will continue to multiply for public land managers and the motorized enthusiasts who enjoy recreating on public land. BLM intends to utilize this same approach in additional states around the country (where such an approach is desired and/or needed). NOHVCC has also expressed their commitment to continue assisting BLM in connecting with communities and moving forward in implementing BLM's goals and objectives for motorized recreation management, in the most fiscally responsible manner possible.

By utilizing the community-driven process described in this Action Plan, including the implementation of specific action items through strategic approaches, land managers can continue to leverage resources through partnerships to engage stakeholders. This will help identify volunteer, in-kind, and financial resources, which will improve high priority motorized recreation areas throughout the State.

As BLM Resource Management Plans, Travel Management Plans, and Recreation Area Management Plans are completed around the country, and new or current recreation management areas (both Special and Extensive) are created or enhanced, these same strategies could be incorporated to assist in achieving BLM's ultimate goal of providing users with high quality motorized recreation opportunities and experiences on BLM-managed lands.

Important Note

The "Action Items" listed in table 1 are simply recommendations to land managers that manage motorized recreation opportunities in Alaska. This plan encourages specific actions to provide quality motorized recreation opportunities and experiences but does not require it. Many of the items listed are simple in nature and can be completed through partnerships with NOHVCC and their group of formal, local partners at little or no cost to the land manager. Larger action items will require a significant financial investment, including professional engineering, development, and maintenance to be successful. Before specific projects begin, or facilities are installed at these areas, appropriate level National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis must be completed, and a maintenance plan should be developed to ensure long-term success.

Appendix A – Reference Documents

- **BLM National Management Strategy for Motorized Off-Highway Vehicle Use on Public Lands (2001):** This plan provided guidance to BLM field offices, using input from various interest groups and individuals with techniques on how to address motorized OHV use on public lands. The strategy addressed multiple OHV-specific issues, identified subsequent management goals, and established action items to address these emerging issues.
- **BLM 1626 - Travel and Transportation Manual (2016):** This manual provides detailed policy, direction, and guidance to establish a comprehensive program for travel and transportation planning within the Bureau of Land Management's land use planning process.
- **BLM 8342-1 – Travel and Transportation Handbook (2012):** This Handbook provides specific guidance for preparing, revising, maintaining, implementing, monitoring, evaluating BLM land use and travel management plans. It provides further guidance related to the objectives, authorities, responsibilities, and policy considerations outlined in the Manual Section 1626, Travel and Transportation Management. The material in this Handbook will replace the previous guidance issued in Appendix C, section II. D of the Land use Planning Handbook (H-1601-1).
- **Off-Highway Motorcycle & ATV Trails Guidelines for Design, Construction, Maintenance and User Satisfaction by Joe Wernex (1994):** This resource is a second edition to the original, **A Guide to Off-Road Motorcycle Trail Design and Construction by Joe Wernex (1984)**, and includes updated information on motorcycle trail design, and added information for All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV) and User Satisfaction. This resource is still heavily utilized today by many land management agencies and recreation service providers.
- **Management Guidelines for OHV Recreation by Tom Crimmins in Association with the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (2006):** This resource provides a comprehensive approach to OHV recreation, including: how to incorporate users' needs and desires; the 4 E's of OHV management (Engineering, Education, Enforcement, and Evaluation); developing a trail vision; system and route planning; trail design; and, active management techniques.
- **Great Trails: A Guide to Providing Quality OHV Trail Experiences (2015):**
This resource will provide a practical and detailed guide for land managers to help plan, design, construct, maintain, and manage OHV recreation trails. The guide will include best management practices for OHV recreation, including the latest in OHV technology, and will give practical guidance on creating trails that are not only sustainable, but also fun to ride.
- **Motorized Recreation Report for BLM Lands in Alaska by the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC – 2025):** This report provides essential baseline information obtained from local motorized recreation users on existing and potential motorized recreation opportunities on BLM lands in Alaska. It aims to assist BLM in creating a strategic, community-driven approach to providing the public with sustainable, high quality motorized recreation opportunities and experiences on BLM lands in Alaska.