

Questions and Answers: BLM National OHV Strategy Process and Time-line

Why is the BLM developing an OHV management strategy?

In the last 25 years, the West has changed more dramatically than any other area of the country. In 1945, the West's population was 17 million; today it is more than 60 million. As Western cities and towns continue to grow and spread closer to once-remote BLM lands, more and more Westerners are turning to these lands for recreation, including the use of off-highway vehicles (OHVs). Today, BLM management of OHVs is still guided by a 1972 Executive Order when only about five million OHVs were in use nationally. Today, there are many more OHVs, and technological advances mean that it is possible for these vehicles to travel over lands that were formerly inaccessible for them. In addition, many of the BLM's land use plans have not kept up with these advances and allow unlimited cross-country travel over large areas of public land that were remote. Today these lands are often prized for other forms of recreation or new scientific information is available on the fragile nature of the natural resources in some of those areas.

OHV recreation is a legitimate use of public land, however, it should be done in an environmentally responsible manner. Under its multiple use mandate, the BLM must balance the needs of OHV users with those of the agency's other stakeholders, including those seeking enhanced protections for open space, threatened and endangered species, wilderness and cultural resources. By working with all its publics to join in developing a national OHV management strategy, we will ensure that OHV users continue to enjoy the public lands, while providing for appropriate environmental protections. Failure to develop such a strategy will likely lead to litigation and court mandates.

What will the strategy do?

The strategy is a public information gathering process, which will result in a document that will provide guidance for our field offices as they resolve OHV issues locally. Since this issue is national in scope, and every western State is affected in some way, we are hoping to gather thoughts and ideas for solutions from everyone interested before we issue any guidance to the field.

How will the BLM develop the strategy?

We will develop the strategy during the summer of 2000 by holding a series of meetings at the State and local level. The public will also be able to comment both electronically and in writing. By sending us your mailing address, either electronically or to the national office at the addresses listed below you, will be informed of the format for providing written comment:

Attn: OHV Comment Manager
Correspondence WO-615
Washington Office
Bureau of Land Management
1849 C Street NW, LSB 406-C
Washington, DC 20240
or
www.blm.gov

Will the strategy result in the issuance of new regulations governing OHV use?

The BLM currently has the authority it needs through existing executive orders and regulations to manage and implement the program. The BLM manual guidance, however, may be out-of-date. Although we are not anticipating any regulatory change, the public may request it. A decision to proceed with new regulations will be made only if this is identified as a critical need. If the BLM does proceed with regulations in the future, it would do so with full opportunity for public comment.

What is the time-frame for developing the strategy?

We will conduct primary public outreach from June through August of 2000, which will entail a series of statewide and local meetings. The BLM will announce these meetings through a press release in early June, which will be distributed widely, and posted on the BLM's home page at www.blm.gov. We expect to issue the guidance to field offices in November 2000. We will post updated information on our national home page. If you would like to be included on our mailing list, please send us your name and address via the home page.

Where will the public meetings be held?

Each State office that administers BLM land will determine the number and location of meetings in that State. The BLM headquarters office will set the date and location of any national meetings.

How can I participate in the public meetings?

Each meeting will consist of a session to provide information on the issues surrounding OHV management to interested publics followed by opportunities for oral comment. Oral comment will address ideas and solutions regarding the OHV Management issues. You are welcome to attend both sessions and listen along with BLM staff, as well as provide comments.

How will the RACs be involved?

The BLM will invite its Resource Advisory Councils (RAC) to participate in the process. They may host local meetings, either as part of their regularly scheduled meetings, or in special sessions. This process may vary from State to State or area to area depending on the way each RAC chooses to proceed.

If I am unable to attend a public meeting, how can I comment on the BLM's plan to develop a strategy?

We will post information on how to participate on our national home page at www.blm.gov. If you do not have access to the internet, you may ask to be placed on the mailing list to receive comment forms and any mailings by writing to the address listed above.

How can I obtain a copy of the strategy once it has been developed?

We will distribute the document to everyone on the mailing list and will post it on the national home page in a format suitable for downloading. Copies will also be available upon request for those who did not participate in the process.

When will the strategy become final and go into effect?

The guidance resulting from the strategy effort will become final in November and go into effect immediately. Local implementation will vary depending on individual circumstances.

Will there be an opportunity to comment on the developed strategy?

Prior to the release of the guidance document in November to the field offices, the BLM Director will make a determination about the extent of any additional comment on the final product.

How is the process related to any site-specific OHV planning already underway?

The OHV strategy is not related to any current site-specific OHV planning currently underway. Those projects may continue, and may choose to consider or include information gathered during this process.

Will the National Strategy incorporate local input generated in the field for other efforts (i.e. the Montana/Dakotas Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS))?

The input generated for efforts such as the Montana/Dakotas DEIS are local or statewide in nature, rather than national; however, the information and lessons learned from these processes will be considered, when applicable, in the national OHV strategy process.

Briefing Paper: National OHV Strategy

Subject:

The growing issue of off-highway vehicle (OHV) management on the public lands has created a significant challenge for our agency. In response, the BLM is developing a national strategy for the OHV program. Increased numbers of OHVs, existing and potential environmental impact in urban and rural areas and increasing legal challenges are among the reasons for BLM's collective look at OHV management across the West. Development of this strategy will involve the public at the onset, including individuals, interest groups, Resource Advisory Councils (RACs), and State and local governments. The public can be involved in three ways: through an OHV mailer, BLM's national web-site at www.blm.gov or during a series of listening meetings held in the western States and in Washington DC. The meetings locations and dates will be announced through local news releases. Public comment will be accepted through August 31, 2000.

BLM will be soliciting solutions and ideas from the public regarding key issue areas, and will incorporate that information into guidance that will be available for field offices to use in November. The expectation is that this collaborative effort will assist our agency in taking the steps necessary to address the concerns regarding local OHV management on public lands through the land use planning process and in day-to-day management as applicable. BLM intends to ensure environmentally responsible off-highway vehicle use on BLM-managed public lands.

BLM Position:

A news release and initial direction outlining the development of a national strategy regarding management of BLM's OHV program was issued January 10, 2000. The goal of the strategy is to improve the overall management of OHV use on the public lands, which has increased dramatically over the last several years. The strategy will serve as a framework for reviewing and addressing issues including but not limited to executive orders, regulations, manuals, current BLM OHV designations, trends in management and management approaches, route inventory needs, resource issues, special management and sensitive areas and resources, monitoring, education, law enforcement and budget. With limited funding and workforce, BLM's resources are best directed towards on the ground efforts rather than spending scarce funding on litigation, protests, appeals, and FOIA requests.

In order to meet our goal of improving OHV management, a series of steps will be taken over the next few months. A national OHV team has been assembled to help guide the process, produce communication materials and prepare guidance based on public comment. During the summer of 2000, public input will be collected. To help focus respondents in providing solution-oriented comments and suggestions, the national web-site and a mailer will be available for public comment, based on a set of key issue areas. All public comments collected will be analyzed and organized, and used in the development of guidance to field offices. Finally, any needed guidance for the BLM OHV program will be issued to field offices on November 30, 2000.