

## BLM should be 'dissuaded' from OHV plan

By **Bob Kingsnorth**

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Jackson County Commissioner Dave Gilmour's off-highway vehicle recommendations (MT, Dec. 14) demonstrate far more thought and due diligence than is evident in the Bureau of Land Management's proposed Western Oregon Plan Revisions.

The BLM selected the 13 Medford District OHV Emphasis Areas because they are currently being used by OHV riders (MT Oct. 29). The fact that certain practices have existed for 40 years does not justify their continuance.

OHV recreationists need a place to ride. The challenge is finding an appropriate place. It is unfortunate that the BLM proposed 13 areas without identifying criteria for evaluating OHV Emphasis Areas or considering the issues identified by county staff and highlighted by Dr. Gilmour.

OHV activity is among the most environmentally destructive forms of recreation that the BLM and Forest Service must deal with. An OHV rider can travel far more miles in an hour than any hiker, equestrian or mountain biker, and causes far more damage to the soils, vegetation and wildlife habitat. When selecting OHV areas, the BLM must recognize the future environmental damage of ever-increasing traffic and consider the means to repair, or at least contain, the resulting damage. Adjacent private land must be protected from any negative impact.

The BLM recognizes the incompatibility of OHV use with other forms of recreation (WOPR Chapter 4, page 778), euphemistically saying, "nonmotorized forms of recreation would be dissuaded from using these areas."

Dissuaded indeed. The noise of OHVs drives away anyone attempting to enjoy the natural beauty of our public lands. Sharing trails with fast-moving OHVs is out of the question. Any area designated as an OHV Emphasis Areas — even a single trail designated for OHV use — will drive out other forms of recreation. Therefore, any area or trail designated for OHVs must be acknowledged as exclusively for OHVs.

While the BLM acknowledges the incompatibility of OHV use with other forms of recreation, it has been slow to acknowledge the incompatibility of OHV use with private homes and private property. The BLM expects hikers and equestrians to be "dissuaded" from using OHV areas and go elsewhere. Likewise, nearby residents will be "dissuaded," but it is unrealistic to expect them to move their homes.

Over 1,600 Johns Peak/Timber Mountain residents and property owners have formally objected to the intrusion of noise, trespass and property damage caused by OHV use. Residents of the other proposed OHV areas have recognized the same issues and are becoming vocal. They have many stories about the abuse and disrespect of private property shown by OHV riders.

Although the majority of riders are law-abiding citizens, there will always be a few bad actors. It takes only one instance of trespass and property damage to destroy the reputations of all OHV riders. Even well-intentioned OHV riders may not realize how far their noise carries and the intrusiveness of that

noise to a homeowner. An OHV trail is open 365 days per year. There is no relief for someone living in the area.

Designating "OHV Emphasis Areas" — even OHV trails — will only draw more OHV activity. Recent publicity statements from the BLM (December WOPR Newsletter No. 8) claim that "designation as an 'Off-Highway Vehicle Emphasis Area' does not mean this area would necessarily be managed to promote or attract future OHV use." However, such statements conflict with the WOPR itself (Chapter 4, page 778) and defy common sense. "Build it and they will come" does apply.

People who live in the proposed OHV Emphasis Areas are protesting existing levels of OHV use. What will the conflicts be as OHV use grows? Should private homes be degraded or sacrificed for OHV recreation?

The BLM claims that intensive management of an OHV Emphasis Area will solve all the past abuses. This is not a realistic claim.

Despite decades of experience, the BLM has yet to adequately manage existing trails. Future federal funding prospects are doubtful. Will there ever be enough money to staff a daily presence to prevent trespass, property damage and damage to the environment? How many officers are needed to police the proposed 100,000 acres, and how many people are needed to repair the damage caused by OHV use?

Somewhere in the BLM's 2.5 million acres there will be appropriate locations for OHV use. However, the BLM will need to justify the choice of these locations with far more diligence than they have done to date.

Robert Kingsnorth is a resident of the Johns Peak/Timber Mountain area. The deadline for public comment on the WOPR is Jan. 11. The WOPR can be viewed online and comments submitted at [www.daylightdecisions.com/wopro](http://www.daylightdecisions.com/wopro), and written comments can be sent to: Western Oregon Plan Revisions Office, P.O. Box 2965, Portland, OR 97208.