Off-highway vehicle proposals

By NEAL ANDERSON

The introduction of off-highway vehicle (OHV) emphasis areas in the BLM's Medford District (13 sites) will impact us all, through increased noise ("The hills are alive with the sound of OHVs"), increased traffic to the access sites, increased garbage at the loading sites and along the trails and increased erosion (Glacier Peak). Since OHV riders can cover 50-75 miles in one day, their presence can be felt over a large area.

OHV riders are a small but vocal minority of those that use BLM lands. In 2006 BLM estimated that OHV riders were less than 6 percent of all those enjoying recreation on BLM lands in western Oregon. The projected annual rate of growth for OHV riding, wildlife viewing, interpretation and nature study is more than three times that of growth for OHV usage. (All data derived from Draft Environmental Impact Statement Volume I, p. 413.) While the WOPR proposes to create OHV emphasis areas, there are no proposals to develop emphasis areas for any other recreation.

Trails in OHV emphasis areas are unlikely to be used for hiking, birdwatching, horseback riding, hunting, and other non-motorized activities. BLM states for the Medford District and other districts: "Non-motorized travel is allowed on all access routes..., but is not encouraged due to potential conflicts and safety hazards...." (Draft Environmental Impact Statement Volume III, p. J-1205.)

BLM has not done a good job in patrolling local areas used by OHV riders, and in public meetings BLM representatives have admitted that they have no additional funding to increase patrolling of OHV emphasis areas. Erosion of steep trails and straying onto private lands have resulted. If OHV ridership increases without adequate funding to patrol these emphasis areas, problems could become worse.

Creating a huge OHV emphasis area could make the Rogue Valley and neighboring areas a destination resort. OHV enthusiasts from outside the region will flock to the hills to ride in not only the OHV emphasis areas but also on the rest of BLM and Forest Service...
roads and trails. The economics of our area and quality of life could take a turn for the worse. Does any reasonable person expect that property values for land adjoining and near to the OHV emphasis areas would go up? Many people would no longer visit because the beauty and quiet that draw them here would be gone. Tourism-related business, such as the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Britt Music Festival, and wineries, could suffer.

The recreational aspect of the WOPR caters to the desires of OHV riders, a small minority of users in western Oregon BLM lands. The creation of up to 13 OHV emphasis areas would effectively remove a large geographical area from use for other recreation. The WOPR states that although OHV usage is expected to rise, usage of OHV lands by non-motorized activities will increase much more. Yet the WOPR considers only use by OHVs. The plan exhibits short-term benefits for a few, with short-term and long-term detriments for the majority. Some provision should be made for OHV riders, but not to the scale where it could have enormous impact on everyone else living in this area. BLM’s plan for the recreational goals of the WOPR is skewed, flawed, and unacceptable.


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