
FOREST SERVICE

The U.S. Forest Service manages 192 million acres of National Forests in 44 states, but only 18 percent have been permanently protected as Wilderness. The remaining 82 percent of National Forest lands are open to non-wilderness uses, but much of this wild, unprotected land provides a variety of important public values, including critical wildlife habitats, clean water, and places where we can experience natural quiet and solitude.

National Forests are being criss-crossed by increasing numbers of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), snowmobiles, and other off-road vehicles as advancements in technology allow these machines to traverse tougher terrain and forge routes through fragile ecosystems. Unmanaged and unfettered off-road vehicle use damages vegetation and soil, pollutes the air and water, disturbs wildlife, threatens public health and safety, and shatters natural quiet.

Off-Road Vehicles Can Go Almost Everywhere:

Dirt bikes, ATVs, snowmobiles and other off-road vehicles can travel almost anywhere in America's National Forests.

- National Forests contain more than 400,000 miles of roads and routes. In addition, there are at least 60,000 additional miles of user-created "ghost roads," many of them blazed by off-road vehicles.
- In the entire National Forest system – covering more than 190 million acres in 155 forests – only 2 forests, the Hoosier in Indiana and the Monongahela in West Virginia, do not allow off-road vehicle use.
- More than 2,400 miles of roads and routes cover the White River National Forest in Colorado. Placed end-to-end, these roads would extend from Denver to northern Maine.

Forest Service Acknowledges Growing Problem:

In an Earth Day 2003 speech to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco, Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth highlighted four "great issues" facing National Forests, including unmanaged off-road vehicle use. The Chief described the explosion in illegal, user-created routes: "Each year, we get hundreds of miles of what we euphemistically refer to as 'unplanned roads and trails.' For example, the Lewis and Clark National Forest in Montana has more than a

thousand unplanned roads and trails reaching for almost 650 miles. That's pretty typical for a lot of national forests, and its only going to get worse." (Managing the National Forest System: Great Issues and Great Diversion, April 22, 2003)

The Chief then went on to describe a litany of other adverse impacts caused by uncontrolled off-road vehicle use, including soil erosion, habitat destruction, damage to cultural and sacred sites, and conflicts with millions of other visitors.

Moreover, the threat posed by off-road vehicles is even more significant when one considers the role they play in spreading noxious and invasive weeds and fragmenting critical wildlife habitat -- two of the other "great issues" the Chief described.

Forest Service has Clear Legal Authority to Control Off-Road Vehicle Use:

The Forest Service has clear authority and responsibility to control off-road vehicle use on public lands. Key sources of that legal authority include:

- Executive Order 11644, issued by President Nixon in 1972, states that "the use of off-road vehicles on public lands will be controlled and directed so as to protect the resources of those lands, to promote the safety of all users of those lands, and to minimize conflicts among various uses of those lands."

- Executive Order 11989, issued by President Carter in 1977, directs federal land managers to close land to off-road vehicles where their use "will cause or is causing considerable adverse effects on soil, vegetation, wildlife, wildlife habitat or cultural or historic resources . . . until such time as [the manager] determines that such adverse effects have been eliminated and that measures have been implemented to prevent future recurrence."
- General Forest Service regulations prohibit a number of activities on and off Forest Service roads and routes. For example, forest uses, including off-road vehicle use, which damage any natural feature, harm any imperiled, sensitive, or unique plant, or which disturb, injure, or destroy any prehistoric, historic, or archeological resource are prohibited.
- Regulations implementing the 1976 National Forest Management Act, 36 C.F.R. 219.21, require that "off-road vehicle use shall be planned and implemented to protect land and other resources, promote public safety, and minimize conflicts with other uses of the National Forest System lands."

Damaging the Land:

All-terrain vehicles, dirt bikes and other off-road vehicles cause soil erosion, strip plants from the ground and spread invasive weeds and disease.

- In one small portion of the Tongass National Forest in Alaska – America's only temperate rainforest, illegal all-terrain vehicle routes have damaged as many as 23,000 acres of critical wetlands. (Bane, 2001)
- Officials in the Wayne National Forest in Ohio describe illegal off-road vehicle use as "an important cause of non-point source erosion into streams and ponds. . . . The ORV trail system is probably the largest contributor to off-site erosion on the Forest."
- In the Sequoia National Forest in California, off-road vehicles have widened some routes in excess of 30 feet to avoid speed bumps while others have ruts 3 feet deep.

Illegal Use Costs Taxpayers Millions:

Illegal off-road vehicle use does more than damage the land and harm wildlife, it costs the American taxpayers millions of dollars annually for emergency repairs, to mitigate future damage and rehabilitate critical resources.

- The Forest Service estimates that ATVs and dirt bike have carved 550 miles of illegal, cross-country routes across the Chattahoochee National Forest in Georgia. The Service has calculated that it will cost American taxpayers nearly \$1 million to repair the damage caused by this illegal network.
- On one ranger district of the Pike-San Isabel National Forest in Colorado, soil erosion, rutting and other damage caused by illegal off-road vehicle use will cost more than \$500,000 to repair.

Harming Wildlife:

Off-road vehicles have a wide range of negative impacts on wildlife and wildlife habitat.

- In the El Dorado National Forest in California, the Forest Service opened three-quarters of critical winter range for deer to dirt bikes and ATVs to accommodate a 100-mile race through the Forest. The senior biologist for the El Dorado described this action as "ill-advised" and dismissed a plan to monitor the impacts of off-road vehicles on deer as "useless." (California Wilderness Coalition, 2001)
- The Forest Service was forced to close a section of Alaska's Tongass National Forest because illegal ATV use was damaging critical wildlife habitat. The Service concluded that "[A]s a result of this illegal use, habitat [for fish and shorebirds] has been degraded . . ."
- The Colville (WA) and Idaho Panhandle (ID) National Forests contain a recovery zone for the endangered woodland caribou. After the herd was twice displaced by snowmobiles, the Service closed this area to these machines.