

ETHICS

FAIR CHASE BIG GAME HUNTING

OHVs can cause considerable damage to the environment when operated in inappropriate conditions (rainy, wet weather) or in sensitive areas (desert, coastal, riparian areas). This is due to the heavy weight and the grinding action of studded tires on soft terrain. The environmental impacts are further compounded by repetitive use. Therefore, one stray set of illegal or inappropriate OHV tracks may cause others to follow and result in substantial ecological damage.

Off-road vehicle damage to slope. Wasatch Mountains of Utah. Wasatch-Cache National Forest. In this part of the Wasatch-Cache National Forest, motorized travel is limited to established signed roads. Obviously many off-road vehicle operators do not comply. Photo made in the upper drainage of the South Fork Little Bear River.

Photo by Scott T. Smith



THE SECOND IN A SERIES:

On the Right TRACK

The Forest Service shows leadership in addressing OHV abuse

Recently, the conservation community witnessed a rare example of political courage when U.S. Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth announced a rulemaking to control the growing abuse of off-highway vehicles (OHVs) on Forest Service lands. This chief is going where others have feared to tread.

The chief is in charge of managing 191 million acres, about twice the size of Montana. Throughout this great landscape that we all own, district rangers and other professionals in the field are fed up with OHV abuse. They are about to do something about it.

At the 2003 Izaak Walton League convention, Chief Bosworth called OHV abuse the fourth-greatest threat to our national forests. He told us, "Each year, the national forests and grasslands get hundreds of miles of unauthorized roads and trails due to repeated cross-country use. We're seeing more and more erosion, water degradation, and habitat destruction."

Make no mistake: OHVs are great tools and great toys. They can be very useful tools and a lot of fun. Every form of recreation has its miscreants. Not all people who participate should be blamed for the bad behavior of a few.

However, with 36 million Americans now owning or using OHVs, even a tiny percentage of bad actors means hundreds of thousands or even millions of people are destroying wildlife habitat, disrupting hunts, polluting the air and water, destroying tranquility, or leaving permanent scars on the landscape.

As a college student doing field research in New Mexico, I remember watching OHV users drain their oil in some extraordinary riparian habitat on the San Francisco River. After tearing up a bank and running over some wildlife, they proudly used the "No Camping" sign in a parking lot as one of the anchors for their campsite clothesline.

In a nutshell, the chief's initiative is to begin a rulemaking so we can

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all get together and agree to close the national forests to OHV use, except where it is specifically allowed. We anticipate this to mean the designation of thousands of miles of new OHV trails and roads. This rule will, however, ban cross-country travel for whomever gets a notion to take off across a wetland, a soft meadow, or a streambank where there is no trail.

The Izaak Walton League has been involved in this issue for many years. Once, in response to an ad titled, "I Break for Fish," which showed a truck running down the middle of a stream, former IWLA Executive Director Jack Lorenz started a campaign to bring attention to the widespread abuse of some OHV users with a stirring essay in the *Wall Street Journal*.

This led to the founding of an organization called Tread Lightly!. Tread Lightly!'s stated purpose was to "improve behavior of ATV users" and, more importantly, to change advertising targeted at OHV users. Unfortunately, Tread Lightly! never fulfilled its mission. Lorenz quit the group's board in protest when

it had become clear that it had failed to become an effective advocate for ethical outdoor behavior.

In 2002, an Izaak Walton League report documented that Tread Lightly! had become a cover-up for bad behavior. It continued to look the other way while industry advertising glorified driving across streams, running over wildlife, driving off trails, and tearing up muddy areas. One Tread Lightly! endorsed advertisement showed an off-highway vehicle intentionally running over a grouse.

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Americans can continue to enjoy OHV use on our national forests, but do so in a way that doesn't destroy these forests or the ability of others to enjoy them. The Izaak Walton League of America will be there to support the chief in this important undertaking. ■



Photo by Jay Clark/IWLA