

ORV use, key supporting rationale was that it promoted tourism, assisted agriculture, was supported by many local people and complemented road shoulders already open to snowmobile use.

Where it is illegal to ride county road shoulders, citizen comment received by the road commission about such riding were that the illegal use damaged road shoulders, led to trespass on private lands and ORVs traveling on road shoulders at excessive speeds in an attempt to evade citation, leading to safety concerns for ORV riders and operators of street legal vehicles. Conversely, where it was legal, road commission managers reported citizen comments that legal use had reduced speeding by ORVs on road shoulders, had benefited service businesses, had led to road and shoulder damage and was often confusing to older motorists, creating a safety risk. As a group, road commission managers were more supportive of having the DNR acquire land or designate existing forest roads to link together existing ORV trail loops than to use the county road system for such purposes.

ORV Programs in Other States

State trail coordinators in other states were surveyed in 2004 to better understand approaches taken elsewhere that may benefit Michigan. A copy of the survey instrument is found in Appendix A. A total of 26 of 49 (53%) other states responded. Only 6 (23%) have a state ORV plan. Twenty-five (96%) had some public land ORV riding opportunity with 77% having federal land opportunities, 73% having state land opportunities and 46% having local public land opportunities. Michigan also has public land riding opportunities at all three levels of government. About half (52%) used a “closed unless posted open” approach, such as Michigan uses in the Lower Peninsula, while 48% had a more “open unless posted closed” approach. In many states this “open unless posted closed” approach is likely to change if the US Forest Service is the provider of public ORV riding opportunity. The agency has announced a nationwide direction toward a “closed unless posted open” approach that is currently being built into forest plan revisions.

In regards to trail systems, most states were unlike Michigan in that the majority of trail miles (79%) were open to all types of ORVs, while in Michigan the system has developed in a manner that provides a significant amount of motorcycle trail and ATV trail. Trail maintenance involved non-profits in 69% of the states, 35% used for-profit contractors, 58% involved the state government, 62% involved the federal government and 23% had some local public maintenance. In Michigan, all the above except for for-profit contractors are directly used and supported by the ORV Trail Maintenance grant program. Relatively few states (27%) were involved in restoring environmental damage from ORV use. Michigan has dedicated funds to annually be spent on restoring environmental damage to public lands caused by ORV use. In addition, Michigan has distinct priorities targeting the protection of surface waters, designated wilderness, federal wild and scenic rivers, state natural rivers and sensitive and aesthetic areas.

Bob Walker (MT), chair of the National Association of Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) State Program Managers, annually gathers and distributes information about state OHV