

Michigan. Suggestions included opening the forest road system in the Lower Peninsula to ORV use without designation as in the UP (especially strong suggestion of ATV riders), allow ORVs to travel wherever snowmobiles can, open some or all county road shoulders to ORV use and site additional ORV facilities in southern Michigan where most people live to enhance convenience, not only for Michigan residents, but also for residents of Ohio and Indiana. A minority, wanted to further restrict ORV opportunity or keep it as it is. Their suggestions included “closed unless posted open” in the UP, not opening county road shoulders to ORV use, better ORV enforcement to catch trespassers on private lands and those riding illegally on Great Lakes beaches and more strict licensing/insurance requirements to operate ORVs.

Beyond those two general orientations there were other important points. A number commented on improving economic benefits of ORV use through tourism. Key suggestions were to improve designated connections from ORV trails/routes/areas to communities with goods and services and acquiring long-term leases for ORV trails/routes on private lands such as those owned by forest products companies. Others advocated for separate trail systems for ATVs, motorcycles and full size vehicles to reduce conflicts and to provide the experiences each group is seeking. Another smaller set of comments was supportive of improvements in managing the designated system including better maps, signage and trail maintenance such as additional grading and re-routing whooped out trails.

A group of those providing written input directly reiterated their support for the positions of the Michigan Cycle Conservation Club regarding the ORV plan update. These positions include additional designated system mileage with additional trailheads and separate trails for different types of ORVs, long distance loop and point-to-point trails to promote tourism, opening forest roads in the Lower Peninsula to ORV use, support for hands-on ORV safety education, no net loss/replacement of trail mileage lost in the system due to a variety of situations such as timber harvest, wet areas, etc., access to ORV generated state gasoline sales tax revenue for ORV programs, improved ORV signage that is compatible between the ORV and snowmobile program, re-route/rest whooped out trail and promote the family values of the ORV use.

ORV Grant Recipient Workshops

Below are the summaries of the September 16, 2004 ORV Damage Restoration workshop (held at the Grayling DNR Field Office) and the September 21, 2004 ORV Trail Maintenance workshop (held at the Ralph A. MacMullen Conference Center). All active grant recipients for each program were invited. Attendants at the Restoration workshop included one or more representatives from the US Forest Service, Michigan DNR Forest, Minerals and Fire Management Division, Huron Pines RC and D, Antrim County Conservation District, Michigan ORV Advisory Committee and Michigan United Conservation Clubs. At the Trail Maintenance workshop there were attendees from the Michigan DNR Forest, Minerals and Fire Management Division, US Forest Service, Cycle Conservation Club, Great Lakes 4-Wheel Drive Association, Irons Area Tourist Association, Michigan ORV Advisory Board, Lansing Motorcycle Club, Twin Bay Trail

Riders, Ogemaw Hills Snowmobile Club, Sportsman's ORV Association and the Drummond Island Off-Road Club.

Environmental Damage Restoration

Participants noted there was a need for a systematic approach to identify ORV damage to public lands. The current operations inventory (OI) on state forest lands is often ineffective in identifying damage as ORV damage recognition has not been an inventory priority and much of the work is done during months of snow cover, making erosion difficult to detect. However, even though there is not a current systematic effort to identify ORV damage, the damage appears to be widespread in the northern Lower Peninsula. It was recommended that a systematic effort be initiated to identify ORV damage on public lands.

There was significant support for the current DNR priorities in restoring ORV damage:

- (a) reduce or eliminate erosion into any body of water
- (b) restore damage in any designated roadless area, state natural river corridor or federal wild and scenic river corridor
- (c) restore damage to aesthetically sensitive areas

Concern was expressed about the complexity ("red tape") in getting funding, such as providing engineering specifications for barriers to access that could be fashioned from natural materials such as slash and stumps generated during a timber sale. It was discussed that the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service provides useful guidelines that private landowners successfully use across the nation (and in Michigan) to plant grasses in filter strips near waterways or on erodible slopes.

Finally, it was noted that there were few restoration efforts underway and that more were needed. It was suggested that additional restoration cooperators could be recruited from the ranks of habitat related organizations with professional expertise such as Trout Unlimited and Ducks Unlimited, as well as from county conservation districts and Resource Conservation and Development Area Councils.

Trail Maintenance

Some participants expressed concern about their ability to maintain the portions of the designated system they are committed to at existing rates of reimbursement. Some noted they needed funds to hire manual labor and that the current rates of reimbursement for ORV trail and ORV route maintenance were insufficient. They also noted that ORV use of the designated system was increasing and this was resulting in additional maintenance expense, as well as the need for additional grading and trail rerouting.

Concerning signage, they strongly supported the DNR creation of sign plans for individual trails. They were specifically concerned that without such trail-by-trail sign plans they are exposed to greater liability when they interpret systemwide standards (IC 1991 "DNR ORV Trail and Route Maintenance Handbook") than they would be if they were following trail specific sign plans. Grant recipients want their role to be one of

following detailed instructions in a trail sign plan on the site specific placement of signs, rather than as an independent contractor with discretionary authority interpreting a system-based sign standard. They were also supportive of signage approaches that made trails more distinct to riders, such as that used in the AuSable Pilot Project to highlight confidence markers.

Finally, they expressed concern about the influence of timber harvest on trail condition, mileage and maintenance. Many noted that harvest tended to straighten trails, thus reducing mileage. Also, trails were often rerouted onto forest roads, reducing the technical challenge and aesthetic value. Some suggested leaving trail corridors in tact. Other suggestions were to clearly measure the pre-harvest mileage and insure equal mileage of equal value is put on the ground nearby to reroute the trail after the sale.

Comments of DNR Field Personnel from Regional Workshops

On October 14 in Grayling and October 15 in Marquette, DNR field personnel were invited to express their opinions regarding issues for the updated ORV plan. Those attending included personnel from FMFM, Law Enforcement and Wildlife Divisions.

Grayling Workshop

How the DNR integrates ORV management into its overall land management and conservation mission occupied much of the workshop. Many expressed concerns that the range of management activities at the unit level has grown while personnel resources have been static or declining. Field personnel were specifically concerned that the lack of trail analysts over the previous year (the two positions in the Lower Peninsula were vacant for much of the time) had limited their ability to effectively manage the ORV program.

There was also considerable concern about ORV damage to the environment, particularly to sensitive hillsides and riparian zones. This was heightened in the counties where all county road shoulders were opened to ORV use. Many perceived that this policy directly contributed to increased environmental damage on state owned lands, even if those lands were not posted open to ORV use. There was also concern about whether ORV rule violations were prosecuted uniformly across the state.

Restoration of environmental damage from ORV use on public lands was viewed as an important, but very time intensive activity. Field personnel were dismayed by what they perceived of as “red tape” in their efforts to access and use ORV damage restoration funds and provided examples of bypassing that system in favor of using the timber sale process to block illegal ORV access and re-vegetate eroded soils. There was strong support for greater field responsibility for administering, implementing and monitoring such environmental restoration efforts.

A number of FMFM management unit and regional personnel noted their support for an employee classification that would provide employees dedicated solely to forest recreation at the management unit level. They cited a year-round workload with snowmobile, ORV, state forest campgrounds, water access sites, rail-trails and pathways.