

Range of Impacts from ATVs

OHV? ATV? ORV?

Off highway vehicle (OHV) is a vehicle registration class for motor vehicles, including all terrain vehicles (ATVs), off-highway motorcycles (OHMs), off-road vehicles (ORVs) such as 4x4 trucks or jeeps, snowmobiles, and jet-skis.

In these fact sheets—we use the acronyms OHV, ORV and ATVs interchangeably.

CROSS COUNTRY CAPABILITY

ATV's, dirt bikes and snowmobiles can get to places not previously accessible to motor vehicles. Each year, higher horsepower, faster speeds and improved gearing, suspension and tire tread allow ORV's to penetrate steeper and more difficult terrain and to push deeper into Utah's backcountry. Wildlife security areas, remote hunting spots and quiet campgrounds are increasingly accessible to off-road vehicles.



Photo by L. Hagen



“With the technological improvements in ORV's (greater horsepower, all wheeled drive, electric winches, etc.) The public is now able to get through deeper snowdrifts, deeper mud and father off- road than has been possible in the preceding 5 to 10 years. This trend in more powerful machines has also added to the problem of off-road and closed road violations as trails cut through more difficult terrain”.

Radial Mountain Travel Management Draft Environmental Assessment, Park Ranger District, Routt National Forest, Wyoming, 1999

The long-distance capability of ATVs and dirt bikes means they cover more land in a given trip than do slower, non-motorized trail activities such as hiking and horseback riding. While foot and horse trails also affect soil, water and other resources, ATVs use many more miles of trail in a day, disturbing correspondingly more land. For example, on average a hiker covers 4 miles in a day while an ORV covers 30 miles.

To satisfy the high mileage demands of ATVs, extensive trail systems are necessary. A horse trail system may be between 12 and 20 miles, while a typical dirt bike route system is between 20 and 90 miles. To meet these high mileage needs ATV users are applying a new standard of measurement to national forests: how many ATV 'riding days' a forest can provide. With a limited land base, it may be difficult for national forests to meet the growing mileage demands of off-road vehicles.*

The long distance, cross-country mobility of off road vehicles means that large tracts of Utah backcountry have become motorized that previously provided quiet, non-motorized recreation opportunities. The vehicle above is driving in Mill Creek, polluting the water and creating sedimentation and turbidity.



*Umcompaghre National Forest Travel Management Plan DEIS 1998