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Pending GAO Study on Off-Highway Vehicles Fatally Flawed

Inherent Problems Deny Any Opportunity for Study to Provide Accurate Findings

Washington, D.C., February 5, 2009 - Nine national off-highway vehicle (OHV) groups today sent a letter to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) noting that an ongoing GAO study on OHV use is flawed in such a way that any findings will be skewed against OHV use on federal lands.

A principal component of the study is a survey of federal land managers that ostensibly seeks to determine trends in the amount of OHV use, potential environmental and human health and safety impacts and how federal agencies are managing OHV use and enforcing OHV regulations. Managers from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) received the survey and were asked to respond.

The letter noted that GAO's survey questions ignore ongoing federal management activities and are ambiguous, subjective and lack context. Both the BLM and the USFS are currently engaged in multi-year efforts to improve OHV management by designating which trails are open for motorized use on each Unit and Forest. The survey ignores these efforts, despite the fact the USFS process is scheduled for completion in December 2009. In addition, most of the survey questions are vague and only provide limited responses that will overstate problems and downplay successes in OHV management.

House Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Ranking Member Rob Bishop (R-UT) recently wrote the GAO as well and expressed his concerns with the survey stating, "First, the survey is critically flawed because it fails to consider that the Forest Service (and) BLM ... are in the process of implementing a relatively new policy for [OHV] use on their respective lands." And, "Second, the survey contains numerous questions that are far too subjective, littered with vague terminology, and lacking context."

Larry Smith, Executive Director, Americans for Responsible Recreational Access stated, "OHV enthusiasts, industry, and, of course, the Forest Service and BLM have dedicated immeasurable effort and resources to designating routes that are open for motorized use. Any study or survey that disregards those efforts is simply not credible." He continued, "If GAO hopes to perform a legitimate study that truly examines OHV use on federal lands it needs to scrap its current survey and develop a new one that not only is far less subjective but also considers ongoing management activities."

National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council Executive Director Russ Ehnes said, "GAO has missed an opportunity to examine OHV use on federal lands, choosing instead to issue a survey that seeks only to solidify biased misconceptions about motorized recreation."

The letter was signed by representatives of Americans for Responsible Recreational Access, American Motorcyclist Association, BlueRibbon Coalition, Motorcycle Industry Council, National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council, Off-Road Business Association, Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association, Specialty Vehicle Institute of America and United Four Wheel Drive Associations.

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