

Summary of Research



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

Selected Results From a 2006 Survey of Registered Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Owners in Montana

RMU Research Summary No. 21

Michael S. Lewis and Ray Paige

July 2006

In the last decade, the sale of off-highway vehicles (OHVs) has increased three-fold. Montana is no exception to this trend. Increasingly, Montanans are purchasing OHVs (especially 4-wheelers) for trail riding, working on the farm or ranch, fishing, and hunting. OHVs include, but are not limited to: motorcycles (dirt bikes), quadricycles (also known as ATVs or 4-wheelers), dune buggies, amphibious vehicles, and air cushion vehicles.

The nature of OHV use makes it essential that riders wear protective clothing (especially helmets), and follow responsible use guidelines in an effort to minimize user conflicts and impacts to the environment. With few exceptions, "cross-county" OHV use (e.g., operating a motorized, wheeled vehicle off a road or trail) is prohibited on publicly owned lands in Montana to protect fragile soils, riparian areas, vegetation, and wildlife.

In concert with federal land management agencies and the Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) promotes a variety of OHV safety and responsible use information in Montana. The goal of FWP's OHV education program is to reduce future OHV-related accidents and encroachments, and improve ethics of OHV riders.

In 2006, FWP conducted a survey of registered OHV owners in Montana as part of an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of their OHV education program. Mailback surveys were successfully administered to 950 registered OHV owners. Overall, a 47 percent response rate to the survey was achieved.

Survey questions were asked in the following areas:

- *How many OHV owners have had safety training?*
- *How often do OHV owners follow important safety precautions when riding OHVs?*
- *How many OHV owners have seen or heard educational materials that address the topic of OHV safety and responsible use?*

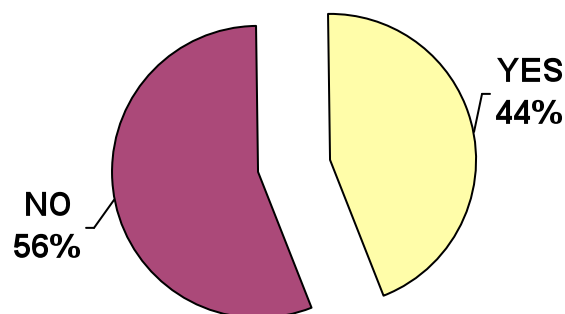
- *How often do OHV owners follow important guidelines for responsible use when riding OHVs, and to what extent do they agree with these guidelines?*
- *How many OHV owners are aware of Montana's general laws concerning OHVs and their use?*
- *How many OHV owners have ever used an OHV when hunting, and how do they typically use OHVs when hunting?*
- *How many OHV owners who have ever used an OHV when hunting have seen or heard educational materials that address the topic of hunting and responsible OHV use?*
- *How many OHV owners who have ever used an OHV when hunting follow important guidelines for responsible OHV use when hunting, and to what extent do they agree with these guidelines?*
- *How many OHV owners who have ever used an OHV when hunting are aware of Montana's hunting regulations concerning OHVs?*

RESULTS

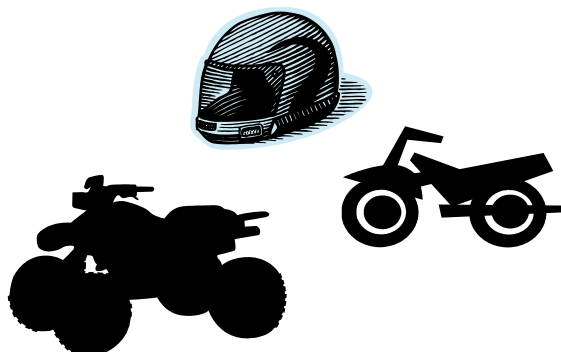
SAFETY TRAINING

Fifty-six percent of the respondents to the survey reported they have NOT had OHV safety training of any kind (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Response to: "Have you had off-highway vehicle (OHV) safety training?"



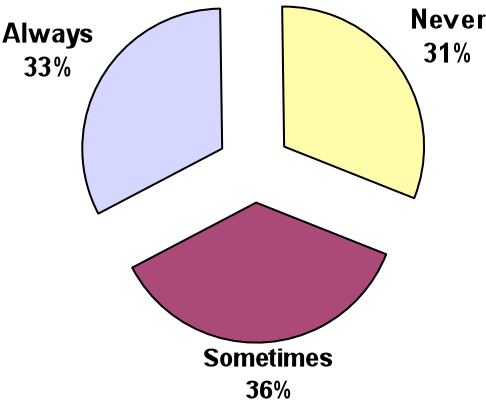
About a third of the respondents who have had training reported they have attended a certified OHV safety education course. Seventy-six percent reported they simply watched a safety video at an OHV dealership or manufacturer.



SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

Only a third of the respondents reported they always wear a helmet when riding OHVs (see Figure 2). A little less than a third of the respondents reported they never wear a helmet.

Figure 2. Response to: “When riding OHVs, how often do you wear a helmet?”



Thirty-eight percent of the respondents reported they always wear other safety equipment (e.g., gloves, goggles, chest protectors, shin guards, and/or boots) when riding OHVs. Fourteen percent reported they never wear these types of safety equipment.

Most of the respondents (81 percent) always inspect and prepare their vehicle(s) before riding. And, a strong majority (77 percent) reported they always let someone know where they will be riding and when they will return from riding.

INFORMATION ADDRESSING THE TOPIC OF OHV SAFETY AND RESPONSIBLE USE

Eighty-three percent of the respondents reported they have seen written materials (e.g., brochures, posters, articles, etc.) that address the topic of OHV safety and responsible use. Only 13 percent reported they have taken the time to read a lot of the materials they have seen. Eight percent said they have read none of the materials they have seen. Written materials were most often seen at the following places:

- OHV dealership or manufacturer (77 percent)
- Newspaper or magazine (55 percent)
- Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (39 percent)
- U.S. Forest Service (33 percent)
- Hunting regulations (31 percent)
- Fair or outdoor show (30 percent)

In addition to written materials, 76 percent of the respondents reported they have seen or heard advertisements on the television or radio that address the topic of OHV safety and responsible use (and/or noxious weed prevention related to the use of OHVs).

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONSIBLE USE WHEN RIDING OHVs

Registered OHV owners were asked how often they follow important guidelines for responsible use when riding OHVs, and to what extent do they agree or disagree with these guidelines (see Table 1 below for selected survey results).

Table 1. Response to:

	How often do you do follow this guideline?			Do you agree with this guideline?				
	Never	Sometimes	Always	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Selected guidelines for responsible OHV use in general:								
It is important that OHV users seek out information on vehicle use regulations for the area(s) they intend to ride before riding.....	4.6%	22.9%	72.5%	2.4%	3.1%	12.1%	48.2%	34.2%
It is important that OHV users carry travel maps that show land ownership and travel restrictions	15.0%	41.6%	43.8%	1.4%	4.8%	21.9%	45.4%	26.2%
OHV users should closely follow all trail, road, and area restrictions that are put in place to protect natural resources, wildlife, and provide non-motorized opportunities.....	1.2%	15.1%	83.7%	3.1%	5.9%	7.8%	34.4%	48.7%
To minimize impacts to the environment, OHV users should avoid riding cross-country or shortcutting the main route when riding on trails or roads.....	3.0%	20.4%	76.6%	1.7%	6.6%	11.1%	35.3%	45.3%
To minimize impacts to the environment, OHV users should avoid riparian areas and wetlands.....	2.8%	25.6%	71.6%	1.4%	4.5%	13.9%	31.7%	48.5%

MONTANA’S GENERAL LAWS CONCERNING OHVs AND THEIR USE

Nearly all of respondents (greater than 95 percent) were aware of the following laws in Montana:

- ▶ *ATVs, 4-wheelers, and motorcycles used off-road on public lands in Montana must be registered with the Montana Department of Justice, Motor Vehicle Division, as Off-Highway Vehicles (OHVs).*
- ▶ *With few exceptions, OHVs must be registered as motor vehicles to be used on public roadways in Montana.*

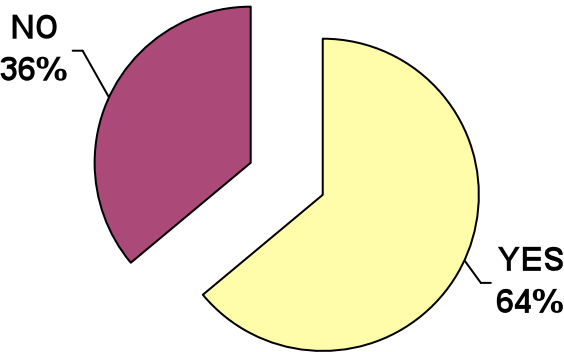
However, 18 percent of the respondents were NOT aware that:

- ▶ *ATVs, 4-wheelers, and motorcycles used off-road on public lands in Montana are required to have U.S. Forest Service approved spark arrestors.*

HUNTING AND OHV USE

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents reported they have used an OHV while hunting (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Response to: “Have you ever used an OHV while hunting?”



- The top three uses of OHVs when hunting were as follows:
- 1) Recovering/retrieving harvested game (reported by 80 percent of the respondents)
 - 2) Traveling to and from hunting areas (79 percent)
 - 3) Scouting out potential hunting areas (57 percent)

INFORMATION ADDRESSING THE TOPIC OF HUNTING AND RESPONSIBLE OHV USE

Two-thirds of the respondents who have used an OHV when hunting reported they have seen written materials (e.g., brochures, posters, articles, etc.) that address the topic of hunting and responsible OHV use. Only 18 percent reported they have taken the time to read a lot of these materials. Six percent said they have read none of the materials they have seen. Written materials were most often seen at the following places:

- Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (69 percent)
- Hunting regulations (57 percent)
- Newspaper or magazine (49 percent)
- U.S. Forest Service (39 percent)
- OHV dealer or manufacturer (31 percent)
- Bureau of Land Management (22 percent)
- Fair or outdoor show (23 percent)

In addition to written materials, 55 percent of the respondents reported they have seen or heard advertisements on the television or radio that address the topic of hunting and responsible OHV use.

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONSIBLE OHV USE WHEN HUNTING

Registered OHV owners who have used an OHV when hunting were asked how often they follow important guidelines for responsible OHV use when hunting, and to what extent do they agree or disagree with these guidelines (see Table 2 below for survey results).

Table 2. Response to: _____	How often do you do follow this guideline?			Do you agree with this guideline?				
	Never	Sometimes	Always	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Selected guidelines for responsible OHV use while hunting:								
To minimize impacts to other hunters, OHV users should access the area they intend to hunting on legal routes and then hunt on foot.....	0.4%	21.1%	78.5%	1.5%	3.7%	13.7%	31.9%	49.3%
To minimize impacts to the environment, OHV users should NOT Travel off legal routes to retrieve harvested game.....	6.5%	51.6%	41.9%	12.6%	21.1%	21.2%	19.6%	34.2%

MONTANA'S HUNTING REGULATIONS CONCERNING OHVs

Nearly all of respondents (greater than 93 percent) were aware of the following hunting regulations pertaining to OHV use in Montana:

- ▶ *It is illegal to shoot from any motorized vehicle including OHVs. An exemption exists for disabled hunters with the proper permits.*
- ▶ *Hunters may not use OHVs to concentrate, drive, rally, stir-up, corral or harass wildlife.*
- ▶ *Hunters are prohibited from shooting on, from, or across the right-of-way of a publicly maintained road open to vehicular traffic. The right-of-way includes road, shoulders, berms, and barrow pits and generally extends from fence-line to fence-line.*

DISCUSSION

This survey is the first of its kind in Montana, and is intended to provide baseline information to be used by FWP to help evaluate the effectiveness of their OHV education program over time.

Despite the fact that most OHV owners in Montana have been exposed to a variety of safety and responsible use information, it was learned from this survey that the majority of owners:

- Have had little or no formal safety training, and...
- Most do not always wear important safety equipment such as helmets when riding OHVs.


Furthermore, some OHV owners do not always follow important guidelines for responsible use when operating OHVs. For instance, about a third of the respondents who have used an OHV when hunting disagree or strongly disagree that "OHV users should NOT travel off legal routes to retrieve harvested game". Only 42 percent of the respondents who have used an OHV when hunting reported they always follow this guideline. Nearly 7 percent reported they never follow this guideline. And, 52 percent reported they follow this guideline sometimes.

These results speak to the importance of FWP's OHV education program, and the need to continue promoting a variety of OHV safety and responsible use information in effort reduce future OHV-related accidents and encroachments, and improve ethics of OHV riders. Along those lines, in the near future FWP intends to explore the following:

1. Work with its partners to develop more and better OHV maps that provide information about the many roads and trails where people can legally ride OHVs across the state.
2. Explore sending direct mailings of OHV safety and responsible use information to registered OHV owners.

3. Make use of more television ads that are informative, interesting, entertaining, and tap into the values of OHV owners across the state.
4. Do a better job of providing safety and responsible use information at places where people go to ride OHVs.
5. Work with its partners to do a better job of enforcing Montana OHV laws, rules, and regulations.

It is anticipated that FWP will replicate this survey in the future as part of evaluating its OHV education program and the effectiveness of these and other strategies over time.

More OHVs are being sold today than ever before. And, riding an OHV is one of the many important recreational activities pursued by Montanans across the state. FWP recognizes this and is working hard to serve the needs of all Montanans, including those who enjoy riding OHVs in our great state. 

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Michael S. Lewis, Human Dimensions Specialist, Responsive Management Unit of FWP, Helena, Montana.

Ray Paige, Trails Program Specialist, Parks Program of FWP, Helena, Montana.

TO OBTAIN COPIES OF THIS SUMMARY

Contact the Responsive Management Unit of FWP by phone at (406) 444-4758.



GRANT PROGRAMS FOR OHV TRAILS. FWP administers two programs which provide grant money for the rehabilitation and maintenance of OHV trails and riding areas.

(1) Montana OHV Grant Program. Funding for this program is provided through OHV registration fees and 1/8 of 1% of state gas taxes. Grants are awarded annually.

(2) Recreational Trails Program Grants. Federal funds to enhance, develop and maintain trails come through the Recreational Trails Program. The program provides that each year 30% of the money for use in Montana be earmarked for motorized trails.

Detailed information and applications are available on the web at fwp.mt.gov/parks/grants.asp or call the FWP Trails Program Coordinator at (406) 444-4585