



COLLISION COURSE?

Off-Road Vehicle Impacts on Hunting and Fishing

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INTRODUCTION

A rapidly growing number of off-road vehicles (ORVs) have driven onto the landscape in recent years, and more and more of these machines are being used on public lands where hunters and anglers pursue their sports. Though most ORV drivers operate in a responsible manner, some, unfortunately, do not. ORVs can provide access to more remote places for hunters and anglers, but increasingly there are reports of irresponsible ORV drivers ruining hunters' and anglers' experiences and damaging natural resources. Even responsibly operated ORVs can cause unintended damage to our great outdoors.

Since its founding in 1922, the Izaak Walton League of America has worked to preserve the nation's outdoors and natural resources. One of its goals has been to preserve the hunting and fishing opportunities that our members and others in the public enjoy.

Hunters and anglers have long supported conservation work by paying federal excise taxes to participate in their sports. For example, funding from the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act (Dingell-Johnson Act) provided \$273 million in grants back to the states for fisheries work in fiscal year 2005, while funds from the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (Pittman-Robertson

Act) provided an additional \$219 million for wildlife conservation work.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, more than 42 million Americans—more than 18 percent of the U.S. population age 16 and older—hunted or fished that year, spending \$64 billion on their activities. Hunting and fishing continue to be important activities in our country, both as outdoor sports and as cultural traditions.

In recent years, the number of ORVs has increased dramatically. ORVs typically include all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), off-highway motorcycles, and some types of 4x4 trucks intended to be driven off-road for recreation. The most recent Forest Service national survey found that the number of off-highway vehicle participants (a somewhat broader band of participants beyond just ORV users) increased from 36 million to 51 million in the four year period that ended in 2004. Many Izaak Walton League members also own ORVs of some type. A 2005 survey of League members found that about one-fifth of them owned ATVs and 84 percent owned at least one 4-wheel-drive vehicle.

The League has worked on ORV issues in the past. Continuing the League's interest in these issues, we wanted to examine possible

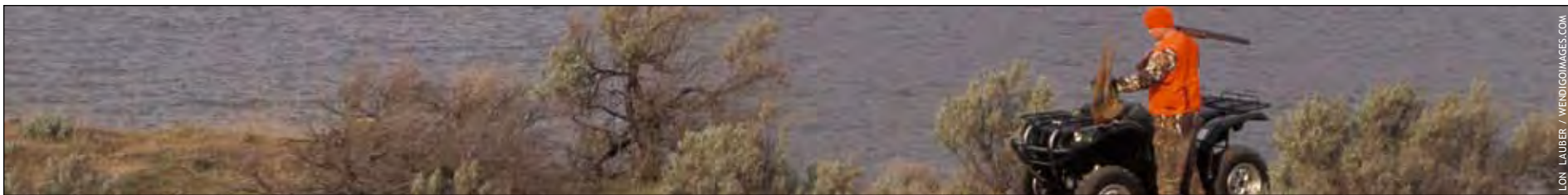
impacts of ORVs and roads on hunting and fishing. This report is the result of that examination. We wanted to look at several possible ways of trying to determine whether or how ORVs might impact hunting and fishing.

To that end, this report provides an overview of scientific studies and journal articles that address how ORVs and roads impact hunting and fishing. It also presents personal stories from hunters and anglers who have had direct encounters with ORVs that negatively affected their outdoor experiences. And it includes a summary of a survey in which state fish and wildlife managers were asked about ORV impacts on hunting and fishing.

The three sections of this report all point toward similar conclusions—that ORVs can indeed have some negative impacts on hunting and fishing, and that better enforcement and education are vital to reducing these impacts.

With a recognition that these ORV impacts are occurring on hunting and fishing, the League believes that some policy changes could be made to lessen those impacts. We suggest some policy recommendations in the conclusion of this report.





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LITERATURE REVIEW

A roundup of the studies done on impacts of ORVs on hunting and fishing

For this literature review, the League examined the scientific studies and journal articles that have been published relating to ORV impacts on hunting and fishing. The existing literature suggests that negative impacts do exist, but more specific studies could shed light on the extent of these impacts.

Many of the existing studies on this subject cover a broad scope. In some of these cases, the literature deals with conventional vehicles on roads, not ORVs on unroaded landscapes. For the purposes of

The challenge is how to minimize the negative impacts of off-road vehicles (ORVs) so that hunting and fishing remain unimpaired, while still allowing the majority of ORV users who drive responsibly to enjoy their activities in the great outdoors.

this review, some studies that were not specific to ORVs were still considered relevant. In fact, the Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society (the organization of professional wildlife biologists) addressed this same issue in its lengthy review of the effects of recreation on wildlife, concluding, “it can be logically inferred that ORVs traveling on trails or closed roads are comparable to conventional vehicles using roads. Additionally, it can be inferred that ORVs traveling in unroaded landscapes, especially when most main ridges are accessible to ORVs, is comparable to conventional vehicles traveling in unrestricted, high road-density situations” (Canfield et al. 1999). Based on this assumption

from the wildlife biologists, this review includes several studies that look at conventional vehicles on roads and extrapolates the findings to apply to ORVs on trails or closed roads.

The challenge facing the League and other conservation organizations is how to minimize the negative impacts of ORVs so that hunting and fishing remain unimpaired, while still allowing the majority of ORV users who drive responsibly to enjoy their activities in the great outdoors.



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AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Wildlands CPR, a nonprofit conservation organization, maintains an extensive online bibliographic database of journal articles and scientific studies dealing with a broad range of impacts from ORVs and roads. Readers interested in accessing additional information on this topic can search this database themselves at www.wildlandscpr.org.



OVERVIEW OF FISHING AND HUNTING IMPACTS

Fishing

Our research has shown that ORVs and roads can have the following general impacts on fishing.

SEDIMENT RUNOFF IN STREAMS AND RIVERS

Sediment runoff from ORV trails or from off-trail erosion usually ends up in nearby streams and rivers. Sediment can cover fish eggs, inhibit nest building, and alter the natural flow of water that oxygenates spawning nests and rinses away wastes (Newcombe and MacDonald, 1991). Another study (though not peer-reviewed) documented one storm event that contributed a suspended sediment load of 109 kilograms from one ORV stream crossing (Ayala et al. 2005).

DAMAGE TO STREAM BANKS AND STREAMBEDS

Unfortunately, some ORV drivers run their machines along stream banks or even in streambeds. This can cause a variety of negative impacts, including damage to vegetation, erosion, or loss of trees and shrubs that provide shade for streams and help to regulate water temperatures (Clark et al. 1985).

RESTRICTING OR PREVENTING ACCESS TO SPAWNING BEDS

ORV driving in streams and rivers, or sometimes the construction of trail culverts or other stream crossings, can restrict or prevent fish from reaching their spawning grounds. Culvert removals and road recontour work on the Kootenai National Forest in northwestern Montana, for example, showed a 48-percent

decline in fine sediments and a 16-percent increase in bull trout nests, called redds, after five years of monitoring (Wegner 1999). Recently, another study (McCaffery et al. 2007) found improvements to fish habitat following road removal in the Flathead National Forest in northwestern Montana as well. Streams in watersheds that had extensive road removal had significantly less fine sediment than streams in roaded watersheds.

There appear to be few, if any, studies or reports that looked at the impacts of ORVs and roads on specific fish species. But there are many studies that linked fish declines to roads and increased road densities. In a review of several scientific studies, the U.S. Forest Service found suppressed fish populations due primarily to roads (Gucinski et al. 2000). For example, an “analysis of fish distribution and status data for seven species of anadromous and resident salmonids in the Columbia basin showed that the frequency of strong populations generally declined with increasing road densities.” The agency further found that “additional evidence suggested that the lowest mean road-density values (number of roads per unit area) are always associated with strong population status” (Gucinski et al. 2000).



WILDLANDS CPR

SPECIAL REPORT: IMPACT OF OFF-ROAD VEHICLES ON HUNTING AND FISHING



OVERVIEW OF FISHING AND HUNTING IMPACTS

Hunting

Our research has shown that ORVs and roads can have the following general impacts on hunting.

DAMAGE TO OR LOSS OF HABITAT

ORVs can cause soil erosion, vegetation and forage loss, habitat fragmentation, and introduction of non-native invasive species (Schubert and Associates 1999; Belnap 2003; Cole and Bayfield 1993; Gelbard and Harrison 2003.) One study of ORV trails in the Wayne National Forest in Ohio found soil erosion rates as high as 209 kg/m²/year (Sack and da Luz 2003). A study in Montana found that a single ATV can disperse more than 2,000 knapweed seeds over a 10-mile radius. And a study in Wisconsin's Chequamegon National Forest documented the presence of invasive plants along ORV trails (Montana State University Extension Service 1992; Rooney 2005). All of these impacts can lead to overall habitat degradation.

INCREASED DISTURBANCE AND STRESS TO GAME

Noise from ORVs and the disturbance they cause can result in a range of impacts for various species, including such things as altered movement patterns (Wisdom et al. 2004, Preisler et al. 2006) and avoidance (Janis and Clark 2002, Wisdom 2007). Elk have been shown to move twice as far from ATV disturbance, for example, as from people on foot (Vieira 2000).

EFFECTS OF ORVS ON SPECIFIC GAME SPECIES

ELK

Elk have been extensively studied through the years. Some of these studies have examined impacts of ORVs and roads on elk. These studies have concluded the following:

1. Elk tend to avoid areas near open roads and ORV routes (Edge and Marcum 1991, Wisdom 2007). Recently, another study reported preliminary results suggesting that ORVs are causing a shift in the spatial distribution of elk in Oregon (Wisdom 2007).
2. Elk vulnerability to mortality from hunter harvest, both legal and illegal, increases as open-road density increases (Unsworth 1993; McCorquodale et al. 2003).
3. In areas of higher road density, elk exhibit levels of stress and increased movement rates (Rowland et al. 2005).
4. ATVs tend to disturb elk much more than people on foot do. One master's thesis (Vieira 2000) indicated that elk in the White River area of Colorado moved twice as far from ATV disturbance as from people on foot. Another study showed that elk tolerated hikers to within 500 feet, but that elk moved when ATVs came within 2,000 yards. Furthermore, elk tended to walk away from hikers but ran from ATVs (Wisdom et al. 2004).
5. Closing roads can benefit elk.
 - a. Road closures allowed elk to stay in preferred habitat longer, rather than being displaced (Irwin and Peek 1979).
 - b. Closing roads extended the age structure and doubled the bulls-to-cows ratio (Leptich and Zager 1991).
 - c. Elk hunter success almost doubled when open-road density was reduced from 2.54 km/km² to 0.56 km/km² (Gratson and Whitman 2000).
 - d. Road closures may improve elk performance, increase the amount of effective habitat, increase hunting opportunities, decrease damage to crops, improve diet quality, increase hunter satisfaction, and decrease vulnerability of elk during the hunting season (Rowland et al. 2005).



EFFECTS OF ORVS ON SPECIFIC GAME SPECIES

BIGHORN SHEEP

One study in Utah compared desert bighorn sheep living within an area of high human disturbance to those living within an area of low human disturbance. Vehicles and hikers deliberately harassed bighorns in both areas to determine the animals' responses. The bighorns from the highly disturbed area generally responded with running flight 83 percent of the time, while the bighorns from the undisturbed area responded more often with non-flight behaviors and fled only 46 percent of the time. Bighorns from the disturbed area were stressed longer while being harassed than bighorns from the undisturbed area while similarly harassed (King 1985; King and Workman 1986).

BLACK BEAR

In New York's Adirondacks, research showed an inverse relationship between road density and black bear populations (Brocke et al. 1990). Another study that examined black bear populations both inside and near the Pisgah Bear Sanctuary in North Carolina concluded that reducing human access to black bears and their habitat appears crucial for population success, either by making large sanctuaries or by eliminating some roads (Powell et al. 1996).

CARIBOU

Caribou are sensitive to a range of disturbances. They move away from sources of disturbance, increase their stress level near disturbances, delay their crossing or fail to cross linear structures like pipelines or roads, shift away from areas of development, and are killed in collisions with vehicles and by hunting along roads (Wolfe et al. 2000).

A growing body of evidence in journals and other studies points to the conclusion that ORVs can negatively affect hunting and fishing.

GRIZZLY BEAR

Research has shown that there is a strong negative relationship between road density and population fitness for grizzly bears in the Rocky Mountains. In the Swan Mountains study, eight grizzly bears were killed between 1988 and 1994, directly influenced by road access (through illegal killing) and unnatural food sources (Mace et al. 1996; Mattson et al. 1996).

GREATER SAGE GROUSE

Populations of greater sage grouse have undergone long-term decline. Among the factors that have contributed to this decline are urbanization and increasing human populations that have resulted in an extensive network of roads, power lines, railroads, and communications towers. Roads and other corridors promote the invasion of exotic plants, provide travel routes for predators, and facilitate human access into sagebrush habitats. Noise disturbance from vehicles and construction activities can also disrupt sage grouse breeding and nesting (Connelly et al. 2004).

SUMMARY

Not all ORVs negatively impact hunting and fishing, but some ORVs driven in certain places and in certain ways can. Though more studies are still needed on many aspects of ORV impacts on wildlife and fisheries, a growing body of evidence in journals and other studies points to the conclusion that ORVs can negatively affect hunting and fishing.

As the popularity of ORVs continues to climb across the country and particularly in hunting and fishing locations, we need to continue to explore ways to minimize the negative impacts of ORVs on these important outdoor activities.



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SPECIAL REPORT: IMPACT OF OFF-ROAD VEHICLES ON HUNTING AND FISHING





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STORIES FROM THE FIELD

As part of the League's efforts to better understand the impacts of ORVs on our public lands and how ORVs might affect hunting and fishing, we compiled the following stories of actual experiences of hunters and anglers across the country. Special thanks go to Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, whose members shared many of the following stories.

RIVER DRIVERS (ALASKA)

My first incident with ORVs came when I was living in Alaska. A friend of mine and I had bushwhacked into a pristine salmon and trout stream to fly fish. We were going after the giant rainbows that follow the spawning king salmon that migrate up the river to spawn. I had king salmon bumping into me as they swarmed up river, and the trout fishing was excellent. Suddenly, I hear the sound of motors. Turning downstream I saw two guys on ATVs driving right up the middle of the river killing fish, dumping exhaust into the river, and trashing the spawning beds of the salmon. The craziest part is that when they pulled up to us I noticed fishing rods on their vehicles. Then they asked, "Catching anything?" To which I replied, "Not anymore!" My buddy and I packed up and bushwhacked back to our trucks feeling quite dumbfounded.

Gregg Bafundo, Washington ➤

*They asked,
"Catching anything?"
To which I replied,
"Not anymore!"*



LAZY WAY TO HUNT

Every year in Idaho, I hunt late in November for whitetails in the Clearwater region. The Forest Service has closed many roads at this time to full-sized vehicles because of erosion and lack of maintenance. However, the road is open to ATVs less than 50 inches wide. Well, this encourages most everyone to ride all this backcountry on ATVs and mainly hunt from their vehicles. I have personally witnessed this. The noise is terrible. This could be a fantastic late-season hunt, allowing foot traffic or horses into the backcountry where it is quiet and game hasn't been pushed far back. But the area has degenerated into pickups loaded with ATVs parking at closed off roads and roaring up the roads hunting from the vehicles. Pure laziness if you ask me.

Bob Gerding, Idaho



STORIES FROM THE FIELD

UNFAIR CHASE

The night before opening day, my friend and I drove the road until it ended. We were headed toward a very steep burn that I had my eye on ever since the fire rolled through this area of Northern California, near Mount Shasta. When the road ended, we got out and finished the climb to the saddle. We camped out and waited for early morning. Rising from sleep before the sun, we chose our positions and waited for light. I spotted some deer finishing up their nighttime feast. The animals were unaware of my position and that of my hunting partner. I could just make out that there was at least one legal buck in the group, and the animals were getting closer. Within moments of the action really taking place, I heard the rumble of ATVs. The hunters on these vehicles drove up the trail we had hiked the night before. The rumble got closer and closer. With ears pointed toward the sound and noses held high, the animals soon decided it was better to go back the way they came.

Mark A. Clifford, California



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Elk are no longer secure over most of the terrain, moving daily from encounters with ATVs . The elk that we caught in these meadows at dawn are no longer there.



HUNTER DISPLACEMENT

Back in 1963, my summer job with the Forest Service placed me in Wisdom, Montana. The Big Hole Valley is what Montana use to be—huge ranches with very few subdivisions. On the west side of the valley, these peaks form the Montana-Idaho state divide. Being from Idaho originally, I first hunted the Idaho side of this divide, making my first bow kill on a 6x6 bull elk in about 1959.

A few years ago I hiked back to the state line from the Montana side. I wanted to look down onto the spot where I had killed that elk over 40 years previously. To get there now, I had to travel up logging-skid trails that are now dusty from ATVs. Virtually every skid trail and meadow has an ATV route. Forest Service trails have been converted to ATV “troads” (trail-roads), even where prohibited. Archery hunters now routinely use ATVs to travel these roads even at night to bugle and locate elk for the next morning’s hunt. Elk are no longer secure over most of the terrain, moving daily from encounters with ATVs . Many fine wet meadows are scarred with multiple ATV trails. The elk that we caught in these meadows at dawn are no longer there.

My friends and I rarely hunt the Big Hole anymore. We lament the failure of the land management agencies to provide the leadership and responsibility of good land stewardship.

◀ ▲ Greg Munther, Montana



STORIES FROM THE FIELD

TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT

I regularly dove and quail hunt east of Mesa, Arizona. I have to be very careful where I shoot because there are so many people on ATVs riding all over the place. Granted, many of them stay on roads, but that is the problem. There are so many roads. I park and start walking into the desert, and just when I think I'm away from the madness, an ATV zooms right in front of me. I can't walk 50 feet without coming across another road, many of them illegal.

J. Matthew Mallery, Arizona

PUSHING GAME OUT

Hunting in the LaSal Mountains of Eastern Utah is becoming more difficult each year due to ATVs dislocating game from accessible areas. ATVs have moved the elk from the lower areas of the mountain to the high ridges that can only be reached by a two- to three-hour hike and where the animal cannot be retrieved without horses. The deer are moved into heavy timber before opening day by the noise from ATVs driving all the roads two or three days before opening day.

Bill Love, Utah



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We watched those big antlers disappear... then we heard the roar of dirt bike engines. A train of them roared along the trail.



A RUINED EXPERIENCE

Several years ago, in northern Idaho in September, I was archery hunting with my father. We got up hours before dawn and hiked to a high mountain pass. We were several miles from the road, but were ready for the hard work necessary if we found a bull.

Just as planned, we heard the bull elk bugle break the dawn silence. That began the nerve-racking game of cat-and-mouse. The bull was reluctant to leave a harem of cows, so we would have to sneak up to him across thick, rugged forest. A few hours later, we had made progress. We came to a high basin we could watch while remaining hidden. We bugled and saw the bull line his cows up like a pack string and herd them straight toward us. We ducked for cover, made sure the wind was favorable, and got ready for action.

Suddenly, everything went wrong. The herd exploded. Elk ran everywhere in all-out panic. We watched those big antlers disappear, crashing off the mountain. Then we heard the roar of dirt bike engines. A train of them roared along the trail, spooking everything in their path. Those riders probably never suspected how much they were impacting wildlife or ruining the experience of other folks. Over the years, I've had similarly disappointing experiences with riders on ATVs and dirt bikes. It's getting worse. If we don't find a balance soon, it's a noisy, dark future for the future of hunting and fishing on our national forests.

✦ Ben Long, Montana



STORIES FROM THE FIELD

DISAPPEARING DEER

Several years ago, I was hunting whitetail deer here in Vermont in a state wildlife management area where ORVs are strictly forbidden. I had walked to the top of a small mountain and came upon tracks of two deer. I followed the trails in shallow snow for about a half mile. I finally spotted both deer ahead of me on a ridgeline about 50 yards away. I had my rifle up on one of them, and was waiting that brief instance for my aim to settle before pulling the trigger, when, suddenly, there was a loud engine sound just below me. Two four-wheelers came churning up a trail. The deer, spooked, disappeared over the ridge in a flash. I ran after them, hoping to get another shot, but they were long gone. I backtracked the ORVs down the mountain to a parking lot where their truck was parked. I took down the license number and called the game warden. I don't know if he did anything. I never did get another shot at a deer that season.

George Wuerthner, Vermont

TOO MANY BAD APPLES

I am a field instructor for the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS). On a number of courses in southern Utah, I have come across ORV use on sensitive soils. The result of this ORV use leads to a breakdown of these sensitive soils, increased erosion, loss of soil fertility, and a decrease in forage for both livestock and wildlife.

In the spring of 1994, while working a course for NOLS in southern Utah, we were finishing up almost a month of hiking through canyon country. The first



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I asked him, "As a land manager, what is your biggest concern regarding the future management of the resources you are responsible for?"

He said, "ORVs."



three weeks were spent on Bureau of Land Management land to the south of Canyonlands National Park. We saw nary a soul. We were walking along the road that goes along a creek, and the reeds were tight on either side of the road. Out of nowhere this Jeep comes around the corner and we were forced to get out of the way or get rundown. We came to find out that the Jeep Jamboree for that year was taking place in Canyonlands. After this incident, we saw 4-wheel-drive vehicles all over the place.

With the amount of roaded country out there, come hunting season, those game animals get pushed all over the place by hunters on ORVs. A friend of mine who moved from Wyoming to outside of Cortez, Colorado, several years ago was out deer hunting two years ago, on foot, and got stopped by a game warden. "You are the only guy I have seen on foot all day," he said with regret in his voice.

Here's another story: In the late 1990s I was doing some work for the NOLS curriculum office, writing an information sheet on the Wind River Mountains. I was talking with the Forest Service employee that manages the grazing permits in the Shoshone National Forest. At the end of the conversation I asked him, "As a land manager, what is your biggest concern regarding the future management of the resources you are responsible for?" He said, "ORVs."

I fully acknowledge that most of the people that use ORVs are nice, law-abiding citizens that play by the rules. However, the bad apples in the bunch are having a disproportionate impact on resources that belong to all Americans.

✦ Andy Blair, Wyoming



STORIES FROM THE FIELD

SCARING THE SALMON

Last fall I was salmon fishing with a friend down on the Elk and Sixes rivers in southern Oregon. Heavy rain had blown out both rivers, but a couple hours north Tenmile Creek supposedly had a nice run of fish and cleared sooner than the other coastal rivers. I'd never actually fished Tenmile before, and the only obvious access point on my map was Spinreel campground. When we pulled into the site, the entire area was taken over by 4-wheelers. We parked and watched a guy in a truck towing another guy on a broken 4-wheeler around the parking lot in a donut, as fast they could go. We tried fishing Tenmile, which was right near the parking lot, but I was too worried about my car to get any fishing done, and people kept riding over to see what we were doing. Not likely to see many salmon there.

Matt Stansberry, Oregon ▲



Two ATVs suddenly came in on me, and they frightened off the turkey.

HIDDEN DANGER

I was hunting for turkeys one time on the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia. The "Mon" does not have access routes for ATVs, so using them is not a legitimate use in the national forest. I like to get away from people when hunting for a variety of reasons, including that it lessens the danger from careless hunters. I had hiked about three miles or so back in, and I was working a bird that I had spotted earlier. Then two ATVs suddenly came in on me, and they frightened off the turkey. They certainly took away from my enjoyment of the hunt. The ATV riders probably were not even aware that I was there, since I was concealed when I was working that bird.

Gary Meade, West Virginia ▲



NOISY JOY RIDE

I was hunting one time for whitetail deer on public land near the Mississippi River below Hastings, Minnesota. My partner and I had been hunting all day, seeing at least two other blaze-orange-clad hunting parties doing the same thing in that area. We had started early in the morning, had quietly scouted out the woods, and then remained still and quiet while awaiting the normally abundant deer. Then, suddenly in mid-afternoon, the woods exploded in noise. A guy on an all-terrain vehicle roared through the woods, joy-riding around. The day's hunt was ruined for me, my partner, and the two other hunting parties we had seen earlier.

Matt Norton, Minnesota ▼



STORIES FROM THE FIELD

MODERN INCONVENIENCE

I like to hunt with primitive means, using black powder muzzleloaders or antique rifles. One time I was hunting antelope in the Comanche National Grassland in southeastern Colorado. I was using an antique rifle, and I needed to be less than 100 yards away for a kill. I had worked for three hours to get close to the antelope, but I needed another 15 yards to get close enough for a good shot. Then ATVs came roaring in, scaring off the antelope.

I've often hunted on the Missouri River Breaks in Montana, on the wild and scenic portion of the Missouri. In recent years, we've seen a big increase in powerboats, filling the whole Breaks with motor noise. We have to walk further and further into the Breaks to hunt. The hunters on the powerboats don't do well themselves, plus they ruin other hunters' experiences. ATVs are penetrating deep into the Breaks now in areas they had never before reached. But they don't have the ethical background about hunting. One

time I saw a guy on an ATV firing a flare into the brush hoping to flush some game. We've had to abandon 40 or 50 percent of the area in the Breaks we used to hunt.

My wife and I hiked into the Ruby Mountains Wilderness in Nevada one time, hunting for deer. Federal wilderness areas like the Ruby Mountains are closed to motorized vehicles, and usually the hunting is pretty good in them. But after hiking into the wilderness, some ATVs came roaring in, and even though they weren't precisely where we were at, they filled the whole area with noise. Their noise flushed out the deer, and the noise destroyed the primitive hunting experience I was seeking.

Dan Heinz, Nevada

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

Fortunately for me, I have not had any stalks on game blown by ATVs. However, recently while walking through the Portland state game area northwest of Lansing, I found evidence of irresponsible use. I have on countless occasions had a quiet, reflective moment shattered by ATVs. Sometimes solitude is more elusive than game.

Ryan Theiler, Michigan



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SURVEY SUMMARY

State fish and wildlife managers cite impacts of ORVs on hunting and fishing.

In a recent survey conducted by the Izaak Walton League, managers of state fisheries and wildlife agencies from around the nation cited negative impacts on hunting and fishing from various types of off-road vehicles. Furthermore, these agency managers strongly indicated that more enforcement of regulations is needed to protect hunting and fishing from these impacts.

While several of the state managers recognized that most ORV riders act responsibly, they also confirmed that irresponsible ORV riders do cause damage. These negative impacts include both degradation of wildlife and fisheries habitat, as well as diminishment of the hunting and fishing experience.

The opinions of state fisheries and wildlife managers are particularly important. They are able to take a more unbiased look at ORVs than do advocacy organizations, and the focus of their profession is the stewardship of natural resources. Many of them also spend time in the field.

For this survey, conducted in July and August of 2007, each of the 50 state wildlife managers and state fisheries managers was contacted via e-mail, and asked to participate in the survey on a secure website. A total of 34 agencies, representing 27 different states, responded to the survey.

WILDLIFE MANAGER SURVEY RESPONSES

Do you agree or disagree that ORVs negatively impact hunting and habitat in your state?

Agree/strongly agree	61 percent
Neutral	39 percent
Disagree/strongly disagree	0 percent

What types of ORV impact do you see in your state?

Resource damage to wildlife habitat.. . . .	83 percent
Disruption of hunters during hunting season.. . . .	72 percent
Increased accessibility to formerly remote hunting areas	67 percent
Disruption of game species during hunting season	61 percent
Riders hunting from ORVs (illegal in some states).	50 percent

Do existing standards and protections in your state adequately protect hunting from harmful ORV impacts?

Yes/Probably Yes	47 percent
No/Probably Not	41 percent
Not Sure	12 percent

If existing regulations do not adequately protect hunting from ORVs, what do you suggest is needed?

One manager said: "We have numerous rules and regulations, but many ORV riders have an attitude that they should not apply to them and many just ignore some rules because they want to ride someplace. It increases law enforcement effort and takes time from other areas."

Another said: "While there is regulatory ability, there is insufficient enforcement response capability to adequately respond to illicit ORV use."



SURVEY SUMMARY

Describe the biggest problem for hunting and habitat that you see from ORVs, as well as what you would like to see improved.

Some responses:

“ORVs can destroy habitat and conflict with fair-chase principles.”

“Degradation of the overall hunting experience for non-ORV users is one of the more significant problems. Would like to see additional restrictions on national forests, which comprise approximately 50 percent of the available public hunting opportunity in my state.”

“Many ORV riders seemingly have no conservation ethic or appreciation for habitat management or understanding of the damage they cause.”

“Habitat degradation and wildlife disturbance. There seems to be a misconception that just because you own a piece of equipment that can go almost anywhere, that you are entitled to go almost anywhere including public land dedicated to wildlife management. This needs to change.”

FISHERIES MANAGER SURVEY RESPONSES

Do you agree or disagree that ORVs negatively impact fishing and fishing habitat in your state?

Agree/strongly agree 60 percent
Neutral 33 percent
Disagree/strongly disagree 7 percent

What types of impacts do you see in your state?

ORVs driven along stream banks and/or lake shores 87 percent
ORVs driven in streams and/or lakes 80 percent
ORVs causing erosion or siltation into streams or lakes 67 percent

Do existing regulations adequately protect fishing from ORV impacts?

Yes/Probably Yes 37 percent
No/Probably Not 50 percent
Not Sure 13 percent

If existing regulations do not adequately protect fishing from ORVs, what do you suggest is needed?

One manager said: “Penalties in existing regulations are not severe enough; enforcement of existing regulations is not given enough priority; and offenders are difficult to capture when observed. Offenders often have no regard for the resources they are impacting.”

Another said: “Need more enforcement personnel and larger fines.”

Another said: “Regulations are probably adequate, but funding for enforcement is currently inadequate.”

Describe the biggest problem for fishing and habitat that you see from ORVs, and one thing they you like to see improved.

Some responses:

“Riding in the streams; sedimentation. Make streams off limits.”

“Stream bank and in-stream habitat degradation.”

“The largest issue is that of unfettered and illegal travel through the use of ORVs. There are areas where these vehicles can recreate, but they tend to utilize the more remote areas. While there are fisheries impacts associated with this recreational activity, the larger impacts are on wildlife habitat.”

“They go where they please, when they please, if they please. Not all do this, but many do. They cause significant upland erosion as well as stream side and in-stream damage.”





CONCLUSION

As this report has shown, ORVs can indeed have negative impacts on hunting and fishing. A growing body of evidence in the scientific journals point to this, stories from the field of hunters and anglers corroborate this, and the state fisheries and wildlife managers confirm these impacts. Taken together as this report has done, the League believes this makes a compelling case.

But the League also believes these problems can be mitigated by developing affordable, common-sense solutions that keep the use of the outdoors responsible and safe for riders, hunters and anglers, and others. In order to arrive at these solutions, the League calls on Congress to:

- 1) Conduct thorough oversight of current U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management efforts to designate and manage ORV routes and to enforce against reckless riding;
- 2) Assess if these agencies have what they need administratively and financially for enforcement, implementation, and restoring and repairing past damage to public lands; and,
- 3) Determine if current rules, standards, and penalties serve as effective deterrents to reckless riding.

With these steps, we can move closer to the goal of allowing for a wide variety of uses and recreation on our public lands while still protecting our great outdoors for current and future generations.



THE IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

MISSION STATEMENT

To conserve, maintain, protect, and restore the soil, forest, water, and other natural resources of the United States and other lands; to promote means and opportunities for the education of the public with respect to such resources and their enjoyment and wholesome utilization.

Founded in 1922, the Izaak Walton League of America protects America's outdoors through community-based conservation, education, and the promotion of outdoor recreation. The League has more than 40,000 members and supporters nationwide. Our headquarters are in Gaithersburg, Maryland, and we have a regional office in St. Paul, Minnesota.



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