Economic importance of off-highway vehicle recreation: An analysis of Idaho counties

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Off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation is big business in Idaho. In 2012, OHV enthusiasts spent **$436 million dollars in Idaho**. $186 million dollars were trip expenditures and $250 million were made in capital expenditures. OHV enthusiasts took close to one million OHV trips per year. On average, each of these households took twelve OHV-related trips in a year, with a party size of just over four people. A typical OHV trip took close to three days.

The most frequently visited counties in Idaho were Valley, Owyhee, and Boise. The least visited counties were Jerome, Lincoln, Oneida, and Washington. Of the one million trips taken by OHV enthusiasts, over half were taken outside their home county. Owyhee County received the most out-of county visitation with 51,000 trips per year.

Of the $186 million in total trip expenditures, $84 million was spent on trips in the home county, and $102 million was spent on out-of-county trips. Of the total trip expenditures for out-of-county trips, close to 76% were made within the home county. The remaining 24% were made in the destination county. The destination counties for OHV recreation failed to capture most of the trip expenditures.

Ada, Kootenai, Bonneville, Bannock, Twin Falls, and Canyon County, captured over half of Idaho’s $250 million OHV capital expenditures.

**Study Details**

In 2012-2013, the University of Idaho in cooperation with the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR), surveyed registered Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) owners to determine the economic importance of OHV use in Idaho. The survey sample was drawn from IDPR registered OHV owners. OHV activities not related to recreation (e.g. work) and out of state visitors, could not be sampled. **Trips and expenditures for OHV recreation in Idaho would be higher if non-resident OHV recreation could be estimated.**

**Idaho OHV Trips**

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| Table 1. OHV recreation trips (thousands) |
|   |  | Home County  | Out-of-county | Total Trips |
| 1 | Valley  | 9 | 49 | 58 |
| 2 | Owyhee  | 4 | 51 | 55 |
| 3 | Boise  | 10 | 44 | 54 |
| 4 | Kootenai  | 49 | 4 | 53 |
| 5 | Ada  | 31 | 18 | 49 |
| 6 | Idaho  | 23 | 21 | 45 |
| 7 | Shoshone  | 9 | 35 | 44 |
| 8 | Bonneville  | 19 | 21 | 41 |
| 9 | Fremont  | 15 | 24 | 39 |
| 10 | Bonner  | 19 | 19 | 38 |

Trips are estimated as total trips taken to each county in Idaho, either by residents of the county or by OHV users from other counties. For example, there were an estimated 44,000 total trips taken to Shoshone County; 9,000 by Shoshone County residents and 35,000 from outside the county.

During the study period, close to a million OHV trips were taken and over half of those were taken outside of the resident county. More OHV trips were taken to Valley County than any other county in the state (Table 1). Valley County hosted 58,000 OHV recreation visits during the year; 9,000 by Valley County residents and 49,000 were from outside the county.

Three of the top ten counties (Owyhee, Boise, and Valley) were the OHV playground for the Treasure Valley. Similarly, Kootenai and Shoshone counties were the playground for Coeur d’Alene and Post Falls residents. Most Kootenai trips (49,000 of 53,000 trips) were taken by residents of Kootenai County. The St. Anthony Sand Dunes and Island Park area were huge OHV visitor destinations, which explains why Fremont County ranked 9th in total trips despite low resident population. Owyhee, Valley, Boise, and Shoshone counties received the most visits from out-of-county residents. Lincoln, Oneida, Washington and Jerome counties host the fewest number of total OHV trips.

**OHV Recreation Expenditures**

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| Table 2. Trip expenditures made by county residents. |
|   |   | Home County Trip Expenditures ($millions) | Out of County Trip Expenditures ($millions) | Total Trip Expenditures ($millions) |
|   |  | Home  | Destination |
| 1 | Ada  | 7 | 23 | 6 | 35 |
| 2 | Bonneville  | 3 | 18 | 3 | 24 |
| 3 | Kootenai  | 12 | 4 | 1 | 17 |
| 4 | Bannock  | 4 | 4 | 2 | 10 |
| 5 | Bonner  | 2 | 3 | 5 | 9 |
| 6 | Bingham  | 4 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| 7 | Jefferson  | 5 | 1 | 0 | 6 |
| 8 | Twin Falls  | 1 | 3 | 2 | 6 |
| 9 | Idaho  | 6 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| 10 | Latah  | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 |

OHV expenditures were classified into two categories; *Trip* and *Capital* expenditures. *Trip expenditures* were those expenses made for non-durable goods and services. Fuel purchases constituted 39% of total trip expenditures (Figure 1). Groceries accounted for 27%. Dining, retail, and lodging made up the remaining portion of trip expenditures. Home county expenditures were those made within the individual’s county of residence. Trips taken within resident counties were often low budget day trips. Ada and Bonneville County received the highest home-county trip expenditures (Table 2). The top destination counties (Owyhee, Valley and Boise) didn’t capture the OHV trip expenditures. For example, trip expenditures for visits to Owyhee, Valley and Boise County were made primarily in the Treasure Valley. The destination counties often failed to capture the trip expenditures for the majority of trips. A total of $102 million was spent for out of county trips, 76% of which was expended in the home county. For example, Ada County OHV recreationists spent a total of $28.3 million for trips to counties other than Ada but only $5.5 million was expended in the destination county.

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| Table 3. Capital expenditures ($ millions) |
|   |   | Capital Expenditures  |
| 1 | Ada  | 40 |
| 2 | Kootenai  | 22 |
| 3 | Bannock  | 20 |
| 4 | Canyon  | 20 |
| 5 | Bonneville  | 16 |
| 6 | Twin Falls  | 14 |
| 7 | Nez Perce  | 13 |
| 8 | Bingham  | 10 |
| 9 | Cassia | 7 |
| 10 | Shoshone  | 7 |

*Capital expenditures* include OHVs, trailers, tow vehicles, maintenance, and OHV accessories. Annual capital expenditures averaged $4,500 per OHV household. More than 75% of capital expenditures were OHVs and tow vehicles (Figure 2). Ada, Kootenai, Bonneville, Bannock, Twin Falls, and Canyon counties captured over half of Idaho’s total OHV capital expenditures (Table 3). Ada County alone captured over 16% of the capital expenditures. Idaho’s trade centers captured OHV capital expenditures made by their own residents, and attracted the capital expenditures of surrounding rural counties.

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