

LCMR Semi-Annual Status Report

I. Off-highway Vehicle Recreation Areas

Program Managers:

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A. M.L. 91, Ch. 254, Art. 1, Sec. 14, Subd. 3 (a)

Appropriation: \$75,000
Balance: \$ -0-

Off-highway Vehicle Recreation Area: This appropriation is to the commissioner of natural resources to conduct a study in cooperation with the Minnesota 4 Wheel Drive Association on the feasibility of an off-highway recreation area.

B. Compatible Data: During the biennium, ending June 30, 1993, the data collected by projects funded under this section that have common value for natural resource planning and management must conform to information architecture as defined in guidelines and standards adopted by the Information Policy Office. In addition, the data must be provided to and integrated with the Minnesota Land Management Information Center's geographic databases with the integration costs borne by the activity receiving funding under this section.

C. Match Requirement: \$0

II. Narrative:

Off-highway vehicles (OHV) have been used on U.S. public lands since the end of World War II. Originally, the few early OHV users employed surplus military vehicles. Small in numbers, their

frequency of use and impact on public lands was small. In the late 1960s and the decade of the 1970s, vehicle manufacturers discovered a ready market for new vehicles engineered for use off-road. They produced and sold street ready motorcycles and trucks and specialty vehicles like snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) on the premise that these vehicles could be used off-road. Despite limited provision for these vehicles by public land managers, sales grew through the decade of the 1980s.

The growth in availability and advanced technology has increased the demand for facilities designed for OHVs. This demand has fallen on our single, sparsely regulated common use area, public forests owned and managed by federal, state, and county agencies. As common use areas, these forests support a wide variety of other pursuits. They provide a land base for production of timber and wildlife resources. Citizens hike, hunt, fish, picnic, ski, and observe nature on these lands.

Currently, OHVs use these lands with limited oversight or regulation. There are no areas dedicated solely to use of OHVs. They operate in the same places that produce other forest benefits. Often the responsible use of OHVs results in conflicts with other users. Public land managers hear of these conflicts in complaints from other users of the forest about damage to resources and ruined experiences. Many OHV complaints stem from organized and, to varying degrees, competitive OHV events. Scrambles, mud runs, and forms of racing concentrate OHV enthusiasts on public lands. Other users of the area at the time and following find their experience spoiled. This leads to displacement of non-OHV users in areas heavily used by OHVs.

Public agencies and private individuals have sought to provide OHV areas. Both have failed. Entrepreneurs' attempts to supply areas for OHVs failed due to costs of land and insurance. Public attempts to dedicate land for these events were stymied by objections from neighbors and other users of public lands. Large, remote blocks of public land do exist where objections are relatively low. Unfortunately, these lands are located at great distances from the larger concentrations of OHV users. OHV use tends to be fairly close to home, and is most often part of a one day outing. As a result, these lands, distant from most OHV owners, hold little promise for accommodating much of the use. Simply put, the problem is finding enough land, close to the owners of OHVs that can be dedicated solely to their use without strong objection of other users. This may be public or private land.

This study will investigate OHV use and needs. The issues identified above and other issues that arise will be analyzed in an attempt to find a solution to the problem. The goal is to identify block(s) of land that could be used for OHVs. In addition, the costs of development and operation will be estimated, for both public and private management.

III. Objectives:

A. Establish study advisory council.

- A.1. Narrative: Given the large number of conflicting interests the success of this study is dependent on development of a consensus solution. A study advisory board, representing the varied interests will be established to assist in the development of such consensus.
- A.2. Procedures: The first step is to identify the interests. Existing Department of Natural Resources advisory groups and the OHV community will be asked to recommend interest to be represented and individuals to serve. The advisors will, at a minimum, represent OHV users, manufacturers, forest recreators, the forest products community, and county officials in the vicinity of population centers. A consultant will be employed to provide staff to the council (see *Objective B below*). The advisory council will be reimbursed for travel expenses associated with meetings. No other costs of participation will be covered. These costs will be paid by the consultant employed to conduct the study and prepare the findings.
- A.3. Budget:
- | | <u>LCMR Funds</u> | <u>Matching Funds</u> |
|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Amount Budgeted: | \$7,500 | \$0 |
| b. Balance: | \$ -0- | \$0 |
- A.4. Time Line for Products/Tasks:
- | | <u>July</u> | <u>Jan</u> | <u>June</u> | <u>Jan</u> | <u>June</u> |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | <u>1991</u> | <u>1992</u> | <u>1992</u> | <u>1993</u> | <u>1993</u> |
| Identify Interests | *** | | | | |
| Appoint Members | | *** | | | |
| Consult With Council | | | ***** | | |
- A.5. Status: John and Michele Genereux, research consultants in the social sciences, were selected on November 1, 1991, to conduct the overall study. A study Advisory Council was selected. It consisted then of twenty individuals representing a broad range of interests

from users to government officials to environmental interests. By October 1992, the number of members was 17. The Project Managers (Messrs. Scott and Collins) assisted the council as participant observers. Four members represented divisions of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The Advisory Council met for the first time on January 8, 1992. Members discussed results of interviews with OHV manufacturers/distributors in Minnesota and the characteristics of OHVs. The consultants convened the meeting.

The Advisory Council met for the second time on May 28, 1992, to discuss the results of research conducted by the consultant to measure OHV needs and the concerns of others (see *Objective B.5. below*).

The Advisory Council met for the third and fourth times in October and November 1992. The object of these meetings was to: 1) discuss the results of visits made by the members to possible OHV recreation areas; 2) develop natural resource criteria for site selection/de-selection; and 3) design a value-weighted, ranking scale to use in selecting final areas which could be developed as an OHV recreation area.

A status report on activities of the Advisory Council through the fall of 1992, was circulated within the DNR to regional offices of the department and to citizens requesting information from the department. Site-related information in the report prompted a number of citizens and regional staff of the department to write letters of commentary to the Consultant and the Project Managers.

The Advisory Council met for the fifth time in February 1993, to make final site decisions and to review reports and research; 1) site development costs, 2) site design possibilities, and 3) concerns expressed by residents living adjacent to active OHV sites elsewhere which might influence siting decisions and enforcement strategies.

At their sixth (and final) meeting on May 19, 1993, the consultants presented a draft version of the report. Consensus was reached on virtually all major points.

- A.6. Benefits: This council guided development of consensus solutions.

B. **Measure OHV Needs, the Concerns of Others, and Define an Area Capable of Meeting Those Needs and Concerns.**

- B.1. Narrative: A study will be conducted to identify existing and projected needs of OHV users. A separate study will be conducted to identify the concerns of others. The OHV needs study will be designed to assist in making location decisions and decisions regarding numbers of sites needed, and minimum site size and design. The study of others will be designed to ascertain the concerns of users of lands that might be dedicated and neighbors to that land. In addition, the study will identify barriers to private development of OHV areas.
- B.2. Procedures: These studies will be contracted using standard contracting procedures. Requests for proposals will be prepared and reviewed by the advisory council. The contractor will be selected by the advisory council. Consultant reports will be part of the basis for and become part of the advisory council's findings.
- B.3. Budget:
- | | <u>LCMR Funds</u> | <u>Matching Funds</u> |
|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Amount Budgeted: | \$47,500 | \$0 |
| b. Balance: | \$ -0- | \$0 |
- B.4. Time Line for Products/Tasks:
- | | July
1992 | Jan
1992 | June
1992 | Jan
1993 | June
1993 |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Develop Request for Proposals | | ** | | | |
| Select Contractor | | ** | | | |
| Conduct Studies | | | ***** | | |
- B.5. Status: The Consultant completed a telephone survey of OHV dealers in December 1991. Results were presented to the Advisory Council in order that the members would have some common base of understanding about OHVs. Drafts and other survey questionnaires were reviewed by the Advisory Council in January 1992 and November 1992.

Results of research conducted in early 1992, were presented to the Advisory Council in a report-for-publication dated May 1992. The report included results of interviews conducted with 12 local OHV dealers; 503 owners of OHVs in Minnesota; government officials in 19 counties in and around the Twin Cities metro region (178 county planners, mayors, and township supervisors); and managers of OHV parks in eastern, southern, midwestern, and western regions of the United States (profiles were prepared on 17 states).

Interviews with OHV dealers and OHV owners (dirt bikes, 4x4 trucks, and, three, four, or six-wheel ATVs) were designed to learn the preferred and acceptable designs for recreation areas, willingness to pay for a site dedicated to OHV use in the Twin Cities region, preferred site management/operations; regulation, and distance that users are now willing to travel to use OHV areas in and outside Minnesota.

Interviews with local government officials were designed to advise respondents of the OHV recreation study, learn about local permits required for site development, learn about the level of local experience with siting major facilities, learn about local recreation activity of OHV users, and, finally, to determine the availability of sites adequate to house an OHV recreation area(s) and the willingness of local officials to site such a facility.

A list of eighty-eight sites were suggested by respondents in these interviews.

Managers of OHV parks outside Minnesota were interviewed to learn about site design, site management, site features, land acquisition and maintenance costs, environmental monitoring systems and results, insurance, and effects of OHV use on non-target populations including human settlements.

As a result of study findings, it was agreed by the Advisory Council that a site should be located within fifty to eighty miles of the Twin Cities (two-hour drive). It was also agreed that a single site with two functions or two sites with specific functions should be considered in a search; one (or two) sites to provide intensive use in a small area, one (or another) to provide trail systems on a large tract of land. It was agreed that most sites could be manufactured or engineered to provide most features desired by OHV riders, but a site should include hills and rocks and tree cover of some density.

Homeowners were interviewed near the General Andrews State Forest OHV trail in Pine County, Minnesota (a nine-mile trail); the Saint Joe State Park south of Saint Louis, Missouri (a 2,500-acre OHV area with camping); and near the OHV trails in the Jackson County and Black River Forests in western Wisconsin (about 35 miles of trail).

- B.6. Benefits: These studies will help define the nature and extent of the problem and provide a factual basis for discussions and evaluation of potential solutions.

C. **Develop Consensus Solution(s) Including Identification of Places to be Dedicated to Organized, Competitive OHV Use.**

C.1. Narrative: Using the advisory council, study results, and other public input and data as necessary, the consultant will identify likely solutions to the problem. These solutions will be assessed against needs and consensus tests. The findings will be incorporated into a final report for review by the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources.

C.2. Procedures: Following definition of OHV area needs, concerns and barriers the consultant, at the direction of the advisory council, will provide potential solutions that will serve the needs of the OHV community and others. The consultant will provide specific rationale describing how each solution addresses needs, concerns and barriers. The solutions will be geographically specific, show direct and indirect costs of acquisition and development and will show the same costs for operation. As necessary, the economic impact of the solutions will be assessed.

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| C.3. <u>Budget</u> : | <u>LCMR Funds</u> | <u>Matching Funds</u> |
| a. Amount Budgeted: | \$20,000 | \$0 |
| b. Balance: | \$ -0- | \$0 |

| | | | | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| C.4. <u>Time Line for Products/Tasks</u> : | July | Jan | June | Jan | June |
| | <u>1991</u> | <u>1992</u> | <u>1992</u> | <u>1993</u> | <u>1993</u> |
| Option development | | | ** | | |
| Option Analysis | | | **** | | |
| Option Review and selection | | | ** | | |
| Report Preparation | | | ** | | |

C.5. Status: The Consultant retained the services of the Land Management Information Center of the Minnesota Department of Administration to "search" a nineteen-county region in and around the Twin Cities area for blocks of land available and appropriate for development as an OHV recreation area(s).

The Center completed its task in August 1992, a month or more after the anticipated date. A total of eighty-three sites were identified in this search which conformed to the following selection criteria:

- area should have extensive tree/brush cover,
- area should have relief enough to support hill climbs (a relief of 75+ feet at a grade of 15 percent or more),

- area must have rocky areas/outcroppings (at least 5 percent of the site, preferably 15 percent of the site)
- area should not include wetlands. A maximum of 35 percent of the area in wetlands is acceptable for first search,
- there should be no residential developments within half a mile of the site (one mile is preferable),
- all counties in the study area should be included in search,
- preference should be given to sites with varies terrain and varied vegetation (abandoned gravel pits or farmsteads would be good locations, and
- areas should be at least 300 acres in size. A premium would be put on areas of 1,000 acres (greatest preference is for areas of 5,000+ acres).

Many of the eighty-three sites were located close enough together to be considered as one. Given this, the total number of possible sites is closer to forty. This total was sub-divided into four geographic zones. The sites in each zone were visited by four sub-committees of the advisory Council during the period August to October 1992. Each sub-committee was organized by a member from the DNR and included four to five members representing the different interest groups on the Council.

Sub-committees reported site evaluations at a meeting in October 1992. Site profiles were prepared for each site visited. At this meeting, the full Council agreed on fifteen areas which should be considered further. Two of these sites were eliminated before the Council met again in November 1992, to develop a ranking system to be used to further reduce the number of areas. The ranking matrix included twenty-five elements in five categories. The Advisory Council met in February 1993, to review the sites again after assigning priority to each of the five selection categories.

Thirteen sites have been identified in the final report as having some potential to serve the legislatively directed purpose. Except for one site, all areas involve at least some private lands while five areas include no public lands.

The list of sites is neither prescriptive nor inclusive of all sites that might be appropriate for a motorsports park. Rather, the list represents sites having varying degrees of feasibility to attract use and serve the needs of operators of OHVs. The Task Force feels that before a park is acquired or developed, there would necessarily

be a detailed assessment of cultural and natural resources including fragile/endangered sites and a planning process with public input from concerned citizens, local units of government, and user groups.

The Task Force has recommended that the following ranked criteria are appropriate to further deselect sites that have been identified to date or to evaluate new proposals:

- > **Environmental:** Preservation of unique habitat, disruption of unique habitat, surface water degradation.
- > **Recreation:** Scenic qualities, useful for non-OHV users, variety of nearby recreation, proximity to other OHV trails, size, good for dirt bikes, good for ATVs, good for 4x4s.
- > **Land Use:** Politically realistic, synergistic with other agencies' plans, conflict with other recreation users, conflict with farm operations, conflict with residential areas, peaceable siting, site useful for other purposes.
- > **Cost:** Cost to purchase, cost to build, cost to maintain.
- > **Proximity:** Proximity to the Twin Cities, proximity to emergency services, ready access.

C.6. **Benefits:** The Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources and affected agencies and individuals will have a course of action that, if followed, will provide the best available solution to the problem of organized, competitive OHV use in Minnesota.

IV. **Evaluation:** The project will be evaluated on its ability to develop feasible, consensus solutions to the problem of organized OHV use. The objective is to deliver an agreed upon site or sites where OHV use area(s) can be developed. The site(s) need to be reasonable in cost of acquisition, development, and operation. They need to be a reasonable distance from urban areas of Minnesota.

V. **Context:** Related Current and Previous Work

A. Statewide trail and forest planning efforts have attempted to address this issue. Competing recreation and commercial uses or public lands near OHV owners have prevented successful forest planning for OHV areas. Trail planning has been comprehensive. Comprehensive planning is too general to address problems of specific OHV area sites.

B. This project will rely on the decisions in the existing forest plans and the statewide trail plan. It will be more specific,

seeking site identification and developing feasibility assessments.

C. There has been little past success locating OHV areas. Efforts have been too general to be useful. This project may result in requests for OHV area acquisition and development funds.

D. Not applicable.

E. Not available.

VI. **Qualifications:**

1. Program Managers: Mr. Scott Jones
Minnesota 4 Wheel Drive Association
6688 - 84th Court North
Brooklyn Park, Minnesota 55445

Experience and qualifications include eighteen years participation in the sport of OHV driving, and membership in Minnesota Go 4 Wheelers, Minnesota 4 Wheel Drive Association (president), Northern Mud Racing, Inc., Stone Brothers Wrecking Crew, and the Minnesota Trail Users Coalition.

Mr. Dan Collins, Supervisor
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Experience and qualifications include fifteen years participation in planning a variety of DNR-administered outdoor recreation units. Also, this individual has been granted a M.Ed. in Parks Management from the University of Minnesota (1975).

2. **Major Cooperators:** Minnesota 4 Wheel Drive Association

VII. **Reporting Requirements:**

Semiannual status reports will be submitted not later than January 1, 1992; July 1, 1992; January 1, 1993; and a final status report by June 30, 1993.