



**Testimony of Bradley Powell
Western Energy and ORV coordinator
Trout Unlimited**

**before the
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Washington, D.C.**

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and provide the views of Trout Unlimited and many other sportsmen/women concerned about the appropriate uses of public lands.

My name is Brad Powell. I live in Payson, Arizona, which is located in the north-central portion of the state, within the Tonto National Forest. I work for Trout Unlimited, a national organization with nearly 150,000 members dedicated to the conservation, protection and restoration of North America's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds. I also am a retired manager with the U.S. Forest Service, serving as a Regional Forester in two Regions, a Forest Supervisor, a National Monument Manager and a District Ranger. In addition, I serve on the Board of Directors for the Arizona Wildlife Federation. I am an avid sportsman enjoying the rivers, trails and public lands of the West. I am intimately familiar with the use of Off Highway Vehicles (OHV's) on public lands both as a recreational user and as an agency administrator for many years.

I appreciate the privilege to speak to you. My purpose today is to convey to you the critical need to develop and implement travel management plans on our federal public lands. I am not here to speak in opposition to the use of OHV's on public lands, but to ensure that their use is compatible with the land's capability (particularly fish and wildlife habitats) and the needs of sportsmen/women, recreational users and others who rely on America's public lands for their enjoyment.

I began my work on public lands 40 years ago, on the Tonto National Forest in Arizona.

Since that time there have been numerous issues (including timber sales, grazing and endangered species) concerning the appropriate uses of our public lands. In my estimation none of those issues has had the potential to cause the level and scale of long term damage that unregulated OHV use has. Agency employees at the time I started my work with the U.S. Forest Service, and for many years thereafter, were proud that our lands were open for recreational use. Hunters, fishermen, campers, firewood cutters and other users could drive where they wanted, mainly with 4-wheel- drive trucks. The use of OHV's was minimal, mainly for administrative use. We sincerely believed that the relatively low amounts of use would cause little damage and were compatible with the natural resources we were charged with managing. To the contrary, beginning in the 1980s and continuing until today, OHV use levels on National Forests have exploded and with it the damage.

The number of off-highway vehicle (OHV) users in the U.S. has climbed tenfold in the past 32 years, from approximately 5 million in 1972 to over 51 million in 2004. The Forest Service manages more than 300,000 miles of roads and 35,000 miles of trails for motor vehicle use. More than 11 million people using OHV's visited National Forests and Grasslands in 2004. In Arizona, the number of registered OHV's has grown from approximately 51,000 in 1998, to 230,000 in 2006. It is estimated there are now more than 350,000 OHV's in the state, and that number continues to grow at a tremendous rate. There are similar growth rates occurring across much of the country.

While many ride responsibly, a growing number of irresponsible users are causing severe impacts by traveling off roads and trails, creating unauthorized routes. Unmanaged OHV use is destroying wetlands, severely impacting wildlife habitats, causing soil erosion, damaging important cultural resources and spreading noxious weeds. Former Chief of the U.S. Forest Service Dale Bosworth speaking at the All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) industry expo in Louisville Kentucky on October 14, 2004 had this to say concerning OHV damage:

“You don't have to go far to see it. I could show you slide after slide—tire tracks running through wetlands; riparian areas churned into mud; banks collapsed and bleeding into streams; ruts in trails so deep you can literally fall in; and sensitive meadows turned into dustbowls. Water quality deteriorates, soil erodes, and native plant communities decline, partly because invasive weeds are spread by tires going where they shouldn't be going.”

I have observed numerous examples of damaging uses by OHV's. In New Mexico, on the Santa Fe National Forest, I vividly remember the deep ruts and bog holes created in prime elk habitat. On the Tonto National Forest in Arizona there are areas that look like heavy equipment has cut deep incisions into the land. On a typical weekend day in the spring there is a dust cloud over the area that can be seen for miles. When you enter the site there is an amazing array of OHV's tearing up the hills and denuding the landscape of its desert vegetation. There are hills with cuts in them up to 10 feet deep that have been caused by the destructive riding. I have witnessed OHV's chasing elk and deer in Montana. I have encountered OHV's in closed sensitive areas, including federally designated Wilderness areas. While working in Kentucky, Arizona and New Mexico, I

saw significant damage to some of the National Forests' most sensitive riparian areas, damaging valuable watersheds and important fisheries. These are some of my first-hand examples, as I talk to sportsmen/women and other recreational users of Federal public lands, almost everyone have similar "OHV horror stories" of their own.

Another major concern is that the budgets of the agencies responsible for the management of our public lands continue to tighten. More and more of the budget are being allocated to suppress wildfires or manage oil and gas development at the expense of fish and wildlife habitats and hunting and angling opportunities.

These concerns and others from across the country led to the development of a Travel Management Planning Rule for the Forest Service, finalized in November of 2005. The rule requires each National Forest to designate roads, trails and areas that are open for motorized use including decisions on where OHV use may occur. Each National Forest is required to publish a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) indicating those decisions. After the MVUM is published, any use of OHV's on routes or areas not identified on the map will be illegal. While there was no deadline for Forests to publish an MVUM in the rule, the Forest Service Chief directed each National Forest to complete their work on travel management by September, 2009. Virtually all of the National Forests are currently engaged in the development of these Travel Management Plans.

I firmly believe that our public land natural resources (soils, vegetation, watersheds, and fish/wildlife habitats) cannot sustain the damage of unmanaged OHV use that is occurring today. It is my hope that the results of this process will be a well thought out, sustainable, managed system of roads, trails and areas that are approved for motorized and non-motorized uses including OHV's. This system should be balanced with the needs of other recreation users and within the capacity of the ecosystem. The identification and designation of the open roads, trails and areas is only the first step in developing a sustainable system. In the long-term, a significant increase in education, enforcement and rehabilitation of damaged areas is essential for the success of the Travel Management plans.

In summary, I have great hope that the new Travel Management plans on U.S. Forest Service lands will lay the foundation for greatly reduced natural resource damage from unregulated OHV uses. My primary concerns are based on the diminished agencies' budgets, lack of personnel and commitment of the agencies to adequately implement these plans. The increased levels of enforcement, education and rehabilitation that will be needed are significant. I don't believe that the agencies are prepared for this implementation workload.

Looking ahead, TU offers the following recommendations for your consideration:

1. Public cross-country OHV travel should be prohibited on all National Forests and other federal public lands except for special OHV management areas and for special needs. In the future, all illegally created user trails should be closed to any public use.
2. A visible license plate that can be used to identify the rider needs to be mandatory for all OHV's used on public lands. These visible license plates would greatly help in reporting and deterring illegal activities, as illegal riders are now essentially invisible. This may prove to be the single most effective deterrent to illegal activities.
3. The US Forest Service should develop an estimate of total the costs to implement their Travel Management plans, including necessary monitoring. The agencies need to develop a funding strategy (including the use of partners) to implement these plans.
4. A federal funding mechanism should be implemented to fund increased law enforcement, user education, signage and rehabilitation of damaged areas.
5. A standardized motor vehicle use map should be developed by each National Forest in a consistent manner that provides adequate detail to inform the user of the National Forest as to what areas, roads and trails are open and closed. This map should be developed in a way that insures that it is the legal notification of open and closed routes.
6. Finally, the Bureau of Land Management has no consistent national approach to travel management planning. They should adopt a similar process as the U.S. Forest Service to ensure that these public lands have well thought-out plans balancing protection of their ecosystems with recreational uses.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I sincerely thank you for this opportunity to talk with you today on this increasingly critical public land management issue, which, left unmanaged, will continue to severely impact our National Forest and other federal public lands in this country. I would be happy to answer any questions.