



## RANGERS FOR RESPONSIBLE RECREATION

DATE: EMBARGOED UNTIL TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2007, 11:00 AM

TO: Interested Parties

RE: Results of Survey of Federal Law Enforcement Officers in the Southwest on off-road vehicle (ORV) Issues

### ***First-Ever Survey of Federal Rangers Shows ORVs Out of Control, Need for Tougher Penalties***

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A first-ever survey of law enforcement rangers conducted by the nonprofit group *Rangers for Responsible Recreation* reveals strong concerns among law enforcement professionals regarding off-road vehicle (ORV) violations on public lands.

More than nine out of ten (91%) of respondent rangers from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) agree that off road vehicles represent “a significant law enforcement problem” in their jurisdictions.

According to one BLM respondent, “90% of ORV users cause damage every day they ride. Most will violate a rule, regulation or law daily.” Another from the USFS wrote that “the numbers of off-road vehicles on public lands... are creating resource damage at an alarming rate. This damage is resulting in adverse effects to the land and the wildlife.”

#### **Scope of the Problem**

The consensus of respondents is that off-road vehicle violations have increased in recent years. Specifically:

- A majority of respondents (53%) say that “the off-road vehicle problems in my jurisdiction are out of control.”
- Nearly three quarters (74%) agree that the off-road vehicle problems in their jurisdictions “are worse than they were five years ago.”
- Fewer than one in six (15%) believe that ORV problems are “turning around for the better.”

One possible reason for this trend is a failure to provide sufficient penalties to off-road riders who are caught breaking the law. “Possibly the greatest weakness in the ORV enforcement program is the lack of bite in judicial penalties,” wrote one ranger from the Bureau of Land Management. “There is often little penalty in not paying tickets. In California... you only have to pay tickets when you renew a license.”

## **Enforcement & Resources**

Overall, the rangers participating in the study support the use of far stiffer penalties against those who commit crimes while riding off-road vehicles:

- Nearly two out of three respondents (65%) do not feel that penalties applied to ORV violators today “are tough enough.”
- Only one third of respondents (33%) reported that they “have the authority to confiscate ORVs used in violations of ORV use rules.”
- Nearly two thirds (65%) believe that “loss of hunting and fishing licenses” would be an effective deterrent of off-road vehicle violations.
- Far fewer participants (39%) feel that self-policing (“peer-to-peer” restraints) by RTV groups has proved to be an effective deterrent.

The broad consensus of respondents is that neither the Bureau of Land Management nor the U.S. Forest Service is currently able to adequately handle off-road vehicle violations on public lands:

- Nearly two thirds of respondents (62%) believe their agency is not “prepared to deal with the ORV problems we are experiencing.”
- Fewer than one out of six respondents (14%) feel that their agencies devote “adequate resources to cope with ORV problems.”

The survey, mailed to nearly 300 BLM and Forest Service rangers and supervisors, is composed of 21 Likert-scale questions and 2 open-ended essays. Participants are federal rangers in Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah and the southern desert area of California. The survey’s 23% response rate exceeded the national standard for success.

*Rangers for Responsible Recreation* is a coalition of retired federal and state law enforcement and land management professionals.

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