

Opportunities for Outdoor Recreation on Public Lands

Witnesses

Panel 1

Russ Ehnes

Executive Director, National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council

Scott Jones

Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition

Dick Lepley

Executive Director, Pennsylvania Off-Highway Vehicle Association

Karen Umphress

Board Member, Coalition of Recreational Trail Users, Minnesota Motorized Trail Coalition

Jim Akenson

Executive Director, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers

Panel 2

Don Amador

Blue Ribbon Coalition

Tom Crimmins

Professionals for Managed Recreation

Sutton Bacon

CEO, Nantahala Outdoor Center

Committee Members Present

Rob Bishop (R-UT), Chairman

John Garamendi (D-CA), Serving as Ranking Member

Tom McClintock (R-CA)

Raúl Labrador (R-ID)

The House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forest, and Public Lands held a hearing on June 22, 2011 regarding access to federal lands for recreational use and the potential economic benefits of recreational activities on federal lands.

Chairman Rob Bishop (R-UT) said in his opening statement that the pattern of outdoor recreation is always going to be changing. He commented that in today's economy the majority of U.S. citizens are taking day trips instead of long week trips. Although more day trips are being taken, he pointed out there is still a high demand for outdoor recreation. Bishop stated that there are differences in opinions on how the public wishes to use these public lands, and while some conflicts are unavoidable between the fisherman and the kayaker, Bishop believes that "there is plenty of room for everyone."

John Garamendi (D-CA) sat in as Ranking Member for Raúl Grijalva. Garamendi reiterated that there is "plenty of room for all of us" in our vast expanse of natural resources within the U.S. Bishop then joked that "maybe 100 pounds ago there was room for all of us."

Rush Ehnes began his testimony with an extensive history of closures of off-highway vehicle (OHV) paths in the state of Montana due to the grizzly bear being put on the endangered species list and travel planning management. These closures have had great impacts on the public specifically resulting in an incomplete system of trails that do not connect to one another causing a reduction in OHV opportunities. Ehnes stated that if there is effective planning for individuals of all interests, this can result in an effective balance that could be achieved for all individuals enjoying the nation's natural resources. Scott Jones's testimony revealed the positive economic impacts OHV recreationalists have on local and region areas. In 2010, over \$33 billion was spent on outdoor recreation equipment. Many of these motorized users require trucks and trailers to move their equipment, these users are staying in

hotels, and buying their food from the local areas resulting in positive income for small towns that would ultimately disappear without recreational opportunities. Jones stated that the paid annual registration program in Colorado developed by motorized recreational users have provided funding to the National Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management to improve and maintain public lands. In Dick Leply's testimony, he stated the positive impacts that OHV recreation has on the economy. He explained that OHV opportunities provide jobs, help stimulate economies of local communities, and contribute to public land enjoyment. Agreeing with Leply's testimony was Karen Umphress who indicated the importance of OHVs to the state of Minnesota in her testimony. She stated that OHVs are used for assistance on the farm and accessing hunting and fishing traps. In his testimony, Jim Akenson agreed that OHV is a source of positive income but cautioned that once the backcountry is gone it is tough to get it back. He was in support of a "clean outdoors" and said a single visit to an area can shape the character of a child as well as change their lives forever when there is no disturbing noise from motorized vehicles.

Tom McClintock (R-CA) started the questioning period by asking Ehnes if the public is being excluded from public lands in Montana. Ehnes agreed and believes that the 2005 Forest Service Travel Management rule did not have the "right amount of thinking put into closing OHV trails." McClintock asked if others have heard similar complaints to the travel management rule. After Ehnes, Jones, and Leply said that they had, McClintock followed up stating that the Forest Service needs to remember that they are "public servants not public masters."

Garamendi was focused on the Forest Service budget for OHV paths stating that there have been significant budget cuts and he thinks that the Forest Service shut down the trails because the federal government does not have the resources to maintain these trails. Ehnes replied that there are local solutions available to maintain these trails such as volunteers. Garamendi questioned whether the public would be interested if a fee system was put in place to assist in designing, locating, and maintaining these trails. Ehnes concluded that if the trails are maintained and the public is assured that the money does go back into the trails, a fee system should work.

Raúl Labrador (R-ID) asked everyone on the panel if the travel management rule has limited the use of OHV in unreasonable ways. Ehnes answered that the rule has had an impact on OHV users and the rule has challenged the community in providing trails. Akenson believes that the Forest Service's issue is the lack of enforcement. Enforcement needs to take place in order to maintain the beauty of these public lands, he said. Jones, Leply, and Umphress stated that they have been working with the Forest Service and believe that working together is the best approach to take in opening and designing trail systems.

In the second panel of witnesses, Don Amador's testimony brought the committee's attention to the closure of Bureau of Land Management lands at Clear Creek Management Area (CCMA) due to naturally occurring asbestos. This area has not had any cases of any human harm in reference to asbestos, and he would like Congress to reopen and designate this area as a National Recreation Area. Tom Crimmins stated support for H.R. 1581, the Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act of 2011. This would "reduce restrictive management practices and direct that these areas be managed for multiple uses, including recreation." He believes this bill will assist the Forest Service in inventorying existing wilderness areas and determining the criteria for setting aside new wilderness areas. Sutton Bacon's testimony agreed with the first panel's statement that OHV brings positive economic impact to areas and concluded that if outdoor recreation areas are maintained, jobs will not go away.

In the question and answer period, Bishop asked what would happen if Congress did not pass H.R. 1581. Crimmins answered that the BLM would be back in the "paralysis analysis" where the BLM manages around the lands that are not suitable for wilderness designation because it is "too much conflict." Many questions were about the closure of CCMA and whether Amador has spoken with other members to achieve bipartisan support to re-open the area. Amador had spoken with other members and strongly believes that the reason why CCMA is closed is due to a political agenda driven by the Environmental Protection Agency. Garamendi stated that all concerns regarding outdoor recreation are difficult to address without the appropriate funding available.

Written testimonies from the witnesses, a documented webcast, and other information can be found at the committee web page.