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Bureau of Land Management
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BLM Publishes Draft National Off-Highway Vehicle Strategy, Opens 30-Day Public Comment Period

The Bureau of Land Management today released a Draft National Off-Highway Vehicle Management Strategy that is intended to promote environmentally sound Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use on BLM-managed public lands. The Draft Strategy, which reflects extensive public input, is now available for a 30-day public comment period that begins today and runs until January 3, 2001.

“This Draft Strategy is aimed at recognizing the interests of OHV users while protecting environmentally sensitive areas on the public lands,” said Henri Bisson, the BLM’s Assistant Director for Renewable Resources and Planning. “It also seeks to focus the agency’s scarce funding and staffing resources on OHV management rather than on OHV-related litigation.”

Bisson added, “The BLM was very encouraged by the public’s participation and input at the 49 OHV ‘listening’ meetings that we held this past summer. In addition, the public submitted nearly 5,000 written comments that 10 BLM specialists have been categorizing and analyzing since September. These comments have guided our agency in writing this Draft Strategy.”

The Draft Strategy offers management guidance and recommends numerous actions aimed at creating a local framework for reviewing and resolving OHV-related issues. These issues include current OHV designations; signs, maps, and other public information; existing OHV regulations; route inventory needs; OHV impacts on resources; road and trail design, maintenance, and restoration; management of Wilderness Study Areas; monitoring; education (both public outreach and staff training); law enforcement; and the BLM’s budgetary needs.

The Draft Strategy recognizes, consistent with the BLM’s existing policy, that Off-Road or Off-Highway Vehicle use is a legitimate activity on public lands wherever compatible with the Bureau’s resource management objectives and when in compliance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976. The Draft Strategy notes that under FLPMA, the BLM is required to manage the public lands in a way that accommodates multiple uses while protecting public land resources. “The BLM believes that this Strategy can provide guidance to promote the balance between these sometimes competing principles,” the 64-page document says.

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The Draft Strategy says that, if fully implemented, it can promote consistency of OHV decision making and management within the agency; highlight the additional funding and staffing needed by the BLM to manage OHV use effectively; lead to an updating of existing OHV regulations and policy guidance; clarify for BLM land managers their legal authorities in managing OHV use; reduce conflicts among public land user groups; promote responsible OHV use and reduce habitat degradation; and provide an opportunity for long-term involvement by the public in OHV management on public lands.

Any member of the public who submitted comments or signed in at an OHV “listening” meeting will receive by mail, a copy of the Draft Strategy early this month. In addition, the BLM has posted the Draft Strategy on its Internet Home Page (www.blm.gov); paper copies of the document will be available from the Bureau’s State Offices and its Washington, D.C., Office by December 8. Comments on the Draft Strategy should be submitted in writing by regular or electronic mail. The mailing address is: BLM OHV Strategy, U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20240. Comments may be sent electronically by clicking on the OHV Strategy link on the BLM’s Home Page (www.blm.gov) or by sending e-mail comments to a BLM electronic address (ohv_comment_manager@blm.gov).

After the conclusion of the 30-day public comment period, the Bureau plans to review all comments and to issue its final National OHV Management Strategy on the Internet on January 19, 2001. Printed copies will be mailed out on January 26.

The BLM, an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior, manages more land – 264 million surface acres – than any other Federal agency. Most of this public land is located in 12 Western States, including Alaska. The Bureau, with a budget of about \$1.8 billion and a workforce of some 9,000 full-time, permanent employees, also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM preserves open space by managing the public lands for multiple uses, including outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, and mining, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources found on the public lands.