



Off-Highway Vehicle Initiative

USDA Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth identified unmanaged outdoor recreation, particularly the unmanaged use of off-highway vehicles (OHV), as one of the four major threats to forest health.¹ Seeing first hand the damage done by illegal OHV use in our forests, friends groups agree that illegal OHV use must stop.

The Massachusetts Forest and Park Friends Network proposes a statewide, grassroots initiative to help stop illegal OHV use.

The initiative:

1. Relies upon the collective effort of individuals and groups to apply strategies known to deter illegal OHV riders;
2. Calls upon enforcement agencies to actually enforce the laws and regulations applying to OHV use;
3. Provides support for people who have become frustrated with the lack of enforcement of laws and regulations established to protect forests and parklands;
4. Strives to educate OHV riders and the public in the laws and regulations that govern the sport.

The Friends Network recognizes that many people regard OHV riding as an enjoyable family activity and a reputable sport. Responsible riders are concerned that irresponsible and illegal use has damaged the sport's reputation. DCR maintains sevenThe Friends Network promotes the idea that OHV riders deserve designated places to. We hope to engage OHV riders and groups in this initiative, realizing that their involvement will add immeasurably to preserving Massachusetts' forests and parklands for everyone. We will gladly work with them to find, fund and support designated OHV areas and trails.

Changing Attitudes

Many people, frustrated by the lack of enforcement, no longer bother to report illegal OHV activity. This initiative encourages people to take an active role in protecting preserves, forests and parklands. No one likes to complain or to report a neighbor or a child to the police. However, riding an OHV on public ways or on protected lands is against the law. When we decline to speak up against illegal OHV use we may become inadvertent contributors to the degradation of private or public property, or worse, to the injury or death of a child.

Friends Network believes we can stop illegal OHV activity by working together, advocating policy changes, demanding adequate enforcement of existing regulations, teaching young people the value of protecting wildlife habitat and by advocating OHV riding only in designated areas only. By supporting one another and expanding our influence we can find solutions to the problems of illegal OHV use.

¹ Dale Bosworth, in *We Need a New National Debate*, Izaak Walton League, 81st Annual Convention, Pierre, SD - July 17, 2003.

Actions to help end illegal OHV use:

Report!

1. The most effective action you can take to help stop illegal OHV activity is to report, report, and report! Environmental Police (EP) must log every call. Your call, combined with other calls, helps EP officers track where and when illegal riding occurs. Numbers do matter! Allocation of personnel and resources depends on documented need. The more you call, the more likely the EP will act. Do not hesitate to call. Calls are kept confidential! In Massachusetts call 1-800-632-8075.
2. Hand out “Report Problem” cards to visitors in the forest, which include the phone numbers of the forest supervisor, the local police station, and the Environmental Police.

Engage abutters:

3. Write letters to abutters of your forest or park where illegal riding is occurring. Ask them to report to the Environmental Police (1-800-632-8075) every time they see or hear OHVs in the forest.
4. Ask abutters to call the local police if they know where OHV riders enter the forest.
5. Ask abutters to post “No Trespassing” signs on property subject to illegal riding. Remind them they are liable if someone is hurt riding on their property.

Adopt a trail, forest or park:

6. Maintain signs and barriers that prevent OHV riding so that OHV users know the trails have regular patrols and that people care. Clearly mark boundaries of public lands where OHV use is illegal.
7. See that adequate and explicit signage is posted at all possible entries into the prohibited areas, especially areas of priority habitats and other critical locations.
8. Promote the idea that it is the community’s responsibility to protect natural areas. Host events to promote sustainable use of forests and open space—more legal users equal less illegal users!
9. Organize and publicize projects to correct areas in the region damaged by OHV abuse.
10. Include citizens in local restoration projects to develop personal attachments to their forests and parks.
11. Join or start a friends group or other groups that work for protecting the environment and better OHV enforcement. A list of friends groups for DCR properties can be found on the web at: <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/friends.htm>.

Speak out!

12. Write “Letters to the Editor” and “Op Ed” articles about the damage being done to our natural resources by people who ride OHV’s illegally—encourage good neighbor policies to raise the standards of what the community will allow.
13. Distribute information on the regulations and laws concerning OHV use. Individuals as well as groups can write newspaper articles, speak out at community meetings, stock libraries with informational brochures and pamphlets, post signs and contact law enforcement officials.

14. Publish health and safety statistics regarding OHV injuries and deaths regularly through local media. Track changes in the statistics and report the changes in updated memos.
15. Publicize data on OHV accidents and deaths, including specifics; such as "On Oct. 9, a 10 year old boy was killed while riding illegally and unsupervised in . . ."
16. Ask your newspaper to include OHV complaints and encounters in the weekly "Police Report".
17. Carry your cell phone with you when you walk or ride in the forest. Take pictures of OHVs you encounter and document sites where OHV use has caused destruction. Publish the pictures in local newspapers or post them on public bulletin boards in stores and on the Internet.
18. Parents talk to your children. Discuss OHV use and the rules and regulations relating to OHV riding. Let them know before they are invited to ride an OHV that OHVs are dangerous and require special instruction to operate safely.
19. Speak to other parents, especially parents of your children's friends. Be explicit that you do not permit your child to ride OHVs in unauthorized areas or without proper adult supervision.
20. Talk to the parents of children in your neighborhood who you see riding illegally. Parents may be unaware that their children are riding when they are not at home.

Educate:

21. Initiate educational programs fostering respect and care for nature and natural resources, possible programs may include:
22. Develop school curriculum tie in with local forests and nature preserves.
23. Set up competitions, scholarship funds or award prizes for students who demonstrate concern for forests and open space.
24. Create a statewide student essay contest with themes such as, "What Does a Forest Mean to You?" with winners receiving special recognition from the Governor or the Commissioner of the Department of Conservation and Recreation.
25. Enlist the aid of stakeholders affected by illegal OHV use when planning events and programs.
26. Post sites and maps where riding OHV's is legal to help direct riders away from illegal trails.

Work with state officials:

27. Meet as an individual or group with your local chief of police – ask him or her to make enforcement of OHV regulations a priority.
28. Ask your police chief to write notices to the newspaper on where and when OHV riding is permitted. Ask him or her to remind people to keep OHV riding out of areas where it is illegal.
29. Write letters and make calls to your Selectmen, Mayor, Conservation Commission, Governor, etc., to let them know you value your community's natural areas and want them protected.

30. Keep pressure on Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to enforce regulations, and to cooperate with other enforcement agencies to apprehend violators of park rules and regulations. The Stewardship Council, a citizen advisory board appointed by the Governor, oversees DCR forests and parks. Let them know you are concerned about OHV activity. Contact Jeff Daley, e-mail: jeff.daley@state.ma.us or write to: DCR Stewardship Council, c/o Jeff Daley, 251 Causeway Street, Suite 600, Boston, MA 02114.
31. Keep tabs on DCR efforts to help solve the problem of illegal OHV's by visiting the DCR website: <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/recreate/ohv/ohvworkgroup.htm>.
32. Notify DCR at OHV.comments@state.ma.us or contact the supervisor every time you have an encounter with illegal OHVs in any of Massachusetts's forests or parklands.
33. Contact your senators and representatives and share your OHV encounters with them. Let them know OHV enforcement is a priority for you.
34. Vote for candidates who promise to make OHV enforcement their priority.
35. Support measures for increased funding to provide for OHV education and enforcement.
36. Support land acquisition where OHV riders can enjoy their sport.
37. Citizens should never confront or try to apprehend a person committing an illegal act. However, reporting OHV riding in non designated areas will go a long way toward helping police officers, environmental police, rangers and forest staff keep our trails safe and protect wildlife. Report illegal OHV use every time you encounter it.

Please join the Massachusetts Forest and Park Friends Network to help keep illegal OHV's from destroying our forests and parks. Visit the Friends Network website www.networkingfriends.net for updates and information regularly. Please contribute any ideas you have to help end illegal OHV use at friend@networkingfriends.net.