



December 15, 2008

Jonathan Stephens
National Program Manager for Trails and Congressionally Designated Areas
USDA Forest Service
Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources Staff
1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Stop 1125
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Stephens:

Please accept the following comments on the National Trail Classification System, Interim Final Directives.

The Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association (ROHVA) is a not-for-profit trade association formed to promote the safe and responsible use of recreational off-highway vehicles (ROVs) manufactured or distributed in North America. Our member companies and the many Americans who use their products have a vital interest in the management of trails on National Forests.

An ROV – sometimes broadly referred to as a side-by-side or UTV – is a motorized off-highway vehicle designed to travel on four or more non-highway tires, with a steering wheel, non-straddle seating, seat belts, an occupant protective structure, and engine displacement up to 1,000cc.

ROHVA generally supports a trail classification system that provides maximum flexibility to land managers. The Background and Need for the Interim Final Directives section of the *Federal Register* notice states that design parameters “...reflect the dominant physical criteria that most define the geometric shape of a trail, including tread width, surface, grade, cross-slope, clearing width and height, and turning radius.” As such, the final directives must accommodate the broadest possible range of criteria. Certainly some managed trails currently on the ground would not fit wholly into any trail class as defined by the interim directives. This does not necessarily mean that these trails are inappropriate or unsustainable. ROHVA believes that the final directives should provide the greatest latitude practicable to land managers who classify trails, while still retaining usefulness.

The Background section also states “...local deviations from any Design Parameter may be established based on trail specific conditions, topography, or other factors, provided that the deviations are consistent with the general intent of the applicable Trail Class.” ROHVA supports this concept but would encourage you to limit the need for deviations by defining trail classes broadly. Some specific recommendations follow.

ROHVA generally supports the definition of “Four-Wheel Drive Vehicle Greater Than 50 Inches in Width,” found in FSH 2309.18, and believes that defining vehicles over 50 inches in width as a distinct class is appropriate. On the vast majority of trails designated for use by four-wheel drive

vehicles it will be suitable, sustainable and safe for ROVs over 50” to be operated on those trails as well. We recognize that not every trail designated for four-wheel drive vehicles over 50 inches will be suitable or appropriate for ROV use, however. It is our expectation that land managers will continue to manage some trails as open for four-wheel drive jeeps and trucks, or highly specialized vehicles like rock-crawlers, but closed to ROVs, and we believe the Travel Management Rule provides them with the flexibility to make the distinction. In some limited instances we believe it is appropriate for managers to restrict ROVs from trails open to four-wheel drive vehicles over 50 inches for largely social reasons, or to provide a jeep and truck only riding area; however, managers should have the flexibility, and be open, to provide ROV-only areas as well.

With regard to the specific recommendations in the design parameters for four-wheel drive vehicles greater than 50 inches in width, ROHVA believes that the maximum percentages for Design Grade and Design Cross-Slope are too low in all categories and should be increased to parameters suitable for jeeps, trucks, rock-crawlers and some ROVs.

We urge you to amend the definitions for Target Cross Slope and Target Grade, which currently read: The cross slope or trail grade “...that is determined to be appropriate over most of a trail to accommodate its Managed Uses.” This definition is ambiguous and open to interpretation. It could be read to mean that the *average* cross slope or grade of a trail must fall within the parameters. It should read: The cross slope or trail grade “...that is determined to be appropriate for multiple and sustained sections of a trail.”

The final directives should also recognize four-wheel vehicles that are 50 inches or less in width, but that are not ATVs. FSH 2309.18 (Zero Code) defines an ATV as a type of off-highway vehicle that travels on three or more low-pressure tires; has handle-bar steering; is less than or equal to 50 inches in width; and has a seat designed to be straddled by the operator. ROHVA believes that the ATV design parameters should be changed to address parameters for “Three and Four Wheel Motor Vehicles 50 Inches or Less in Width.” In addition, relevant references to ATV in the section should be replaced with references to “Three and Four Wheel Motor Vehicles 50 Inches or Less in Width,” defined as “an off-highway vehicle less than or equal to 50 inches in width that operates on three or four wheels.”

The rationale for the change is that in most cases trails suitable for ATVs will be suitable for ROVs 50 inches or less in width, but an ROV does not meet the definition of an ATV, and should not be labeled an ATV due to its different design characteristics. Of course, land managers continue to have the flexibility to designate trails as ATV or ROV-only for safety or other reasons. The final trail classification should recognize and help facilitate this flexibility.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Kathy Van Kleeck
Sr. Vice President
Government Relations