

Nev. Coalition Seeks Rules For Off-Road Vehicles

www.kolotv.com/home/headlines/19597644.html?source=enews&c=y#

Posted: 5:31 AM Jun 6, 2008

Last Updated: 5:31 AM Jun 6, 2008

A coalition of various interest groups is seeking to establish rules governing off-road vehicles in Nevada.

Group members say irresponsible off-highway vehicle riders are tearing up Nevada's landscape and will force closure of public land to the popular sport if left unchecked.

The Nevada Responsible Trails Alliance plans to present recommendations Friday to the Nevada Legislative Committee on Public Lands in Elko.

The alliance representing sportsmen, conservationists, ranchers, law officers and others hopes to persuade the 2009 Legislature to pass legislation ending Nevada's status as the only Western state without a registration program for all-terrain vehicles, dirt bikes and similar machines.

Backers say such a change is needed if damaging off-highway activity is going to be controlled.

"We need badly to clean up the mess that a few people have caused," said Gene Kolkman, alliance director and a former Bureau of Land Management manager in Elko.

Besides requiring off-highway vehicle registration, the alliance seeks support for local, state and federal land management agencies to designate backcountry roads and trails.

It also favors additional protection for private lands and money to enforce off-road vehicle laws.

Increasing popularity of off-highway riding combined with Nevada's population growth is causing a host of problems, including damage to watersheds from the pioneering of new trails, disturbance of wildlife and mounting conflicts with sportsmen on foot, said Larry Johnson, president of the Coalition for Nevada's Wildlife.

"Without a change in current policy, Nevada's public lands and resources will pay the price," Johnson said.

Alliance members emphasize they are not opposed to responsible off-highway vehicle use for recreation or work, with some saying they own the vehicles themselves.

But continuation of the current situation, Johnson said, will result in more "hands-off management" by government trying to control worsening damage.

"In my opinion, OHV access to public lands is in jeopardy," agreed Dan Gralian, president of the Nevada Cattlemen's Association that recently joined the alliance along with the Nevada Sheriffs and Chiefs Association.

"If we do not solve this problem among ourselves, the public land agencies may be forced to close our public lands to OHV use as the only means to protect the land," Gralian said. "This is exactly what has happened in several states."

Nevada ranchers often have fences cut by off-highway riders, putting livestock and motorists at risk, Gralian said. He reports having seen livestock and wildlife "chased and harassed" by all-terrain vehicle riders.

Attempts to pass legislation establishing a registration program and adopting other rules for OHVs were attempted but failed last year, in 2005 and 2003.

Charlie Cox, president of the Nevada Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition, said his group supports the measures.

"Nevada is 20 years behind the times. "Every state around us has a successful program," Cox said.

"Without a program, we're not going to solve any of the problems that exist."