



Protecting and restoring our Olympic forest
and aquatic ecosystems

June 22, 2010

Dean R. Millett
District Ranger, Olympic National Forest
437 Tillicum Lane
Forks, Washington 98331

Reference: Calawah/Sitkum Watershed Collaboration Group

Dear Mr. Millett:

Although we recognize that the Olympic National Forest has long delayed action on a recreation plan, we do not support changing the direction of the Calawah/Sitkum Watershed Collaboration Group away from its legitimate focus: Aquatics. Prohibition of ATV/ORV use is without doubt a positive position regarding clean water and aquatic quality for salmon.

ATVs and ORVs cause great harm to watersheds, vegetation, and wildlife. For example, the use of off-road vehicles in Utah's Arch Canyon has degraded riparian vegetation and the waters of the Arch Canyon Creek. The Forest Service, as stated in its national website, is also aware of the damages created by this type of recreational activity: "Erosion, user conflicts, spread of invasive species, damage to cultural sites, disturbance to wildlife, destruction of wildlife habitat, and risks to public safety can result from unmanaged recreation, including cross-country OHV use." During 2003, Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth identified unmanaged recreation, particularly off-road vehicle use, as one of the greatest threats to America's National Forests. He described a litany of adverse impacts to the land, wildlife and other visitors and highlighted the proliferation of unplanned – or renegade – dirt bike and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) routes that crisscross many National Forests.



We recognize that the Olympic National Forest must include recreational areas for all types of uses. However, in view of the fact that the ONF's budget has decreased significantly over the past 10 years, it is unwise to maintain roads open for ORV activities while attempting to decommission other roads. It is also unclear how, without proper funding, the ONF would be able to manage these areas. In addition, the risk of lawsuits by ORVers who may be involved in accidents is also a major consideration.

Due to the high number of ORV crashes that occur every year, consumer groups, medical professionals, environmentalists, and child safety advocates are very concerned with changing the ORV industry's failing approach at safety. The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons believes ORVs are a significant threat to public health. These health professionals are often the ones who witness the serious injuries and death caused by ORV crashes.

In the CBS "Early Show" of June 14, 2010, Consumer Correspondent Susan Koeppen cited the [Consumer Product Safety Commission](#), saying that in the month of April alone there were 40 deaths on ATVs, 12 of them were children under 16. In May, 13 children were killed. As summer moves along, they expect deaths to go up.

According to [Concerned Families for ATV Safety](#), each year roughly 100 children under the age of 16 are killed on ATVs, and 40,000 children are injured. Many of those crashes involve children riding adult-sized ATVs. Consider these statistics:

- In 2000 alone, at least 254,000 people required medical treatment.
 - Between 200 and 300 people die every year.
 - 30 to 40 percent of all people injured or killed are children under the age of 16.
 - 15% of the fatal crashes take the lives of children under 12.
 - ORV crashes cost society a total of \$6.5 billion in medical, legal, and work loss expenses every year.
 - In Michigan, 41 percent of people killed in ORV accidents were under the age of 16. Additionally, many other young victims were left paralyzed, brain damaged, or with other serious permanent injuries.

Are these risks worth it to the Olympic National Forest? Or should the focus, instead, be targeted towards the protection of watersheds and salmon habitat?

Off-road vehicles are also a major source of pollution on America's national parks, monuments, forests, and other public lands. Irresponsible off-roaders violate the rights of other forest users. These vehicles rip up our most fragile and remote lands. Unfortunately, even in parks where environmentally sensitive areas are blocked off, many riders frequently go around the barriers to ride in those areas anyway. Streams and wetlands are frequently damaged. It is impossible to police the areas enough to stop this behavior.

A few years ago, our own DNR's Northwest Region Manager William Wallace stated: "I am deeply concerned over the numbers of serious injury accidents to ORV riders and the increasing damage to natural resources in the Pilchuck and North Fork areas. Given those concerns closures to ORVs in these two areas are unavoidable."

Washington State Department of Ecology shorelands specialist Jerry Shervey spoke of the environmental impacts to the Pilchuck and North Fork areas: "Keeping unauthorized off-road vehicles out of these areas is good for the environment," he said. "While it might be fun to splash through a creek or wetland, these activities cause bank erosion and stir up sediments that negatively affect water quality, and can harm important fish species, such as salmon and trout."



It is extremely naive to assume that ORV-related accidents and ecosystem damage will not occur in the Olympic National Forest – regardless of promises made to the contrary.

For all of the reasons stated above, Olympic Forest Coalition is opposed to allowing any ORV/ATV use on the Calawah/Sitkum Watershed. We encourage the ONF to stay on track with the mission of the collaborative group and concentrate on the decommissioning of sub-standard roads and the watershed restoration process. Reducing sediment delivery and/or enhancing aquatic habitat must be a primary focus for the Calawah/Sitkum Watershed.

We appreciated very much reading your statement: "The Calawah is a unique and beautiful watershed, rich in many natural resources, and deserving of the most restorative actions that we can offer." We could not agree with you more.

Respectfully,



Connie Gallant
Vice President

cc: Dale Hom
Kathy O'Halloran