



# White Paper: Proposed Oregon Statewide Trails Plan

May 13, 2002

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## Introduction

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) was given responsibility for recreation trails planning in 1971 under the "State Trails Act" (ORS 390.950 to 390.990). In general the policy of the statute is as follows: "In order to provide for the ever-increasing outdoor recreation needs of an expanding resident and tourist population and in order to promote public access to, travel within and enjoyment and appreciation of, the open-air, outdoor areas of Oregon, trails should be established both near the urban areas in this state and within, adjacent to or connecting highly scenic areas more remotely located."

The Oregon State Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Study and Oregon Outdoor Recreation Trails Plan have been in place since 1995. Although many of the findings included in these plans are still relevant, considerable change has occurred on Oregon's OHV areas/trails and recreational trails in the last 7 years (including a 9% state population increase between 1995 and 2000 and increases in OHV ownership and recreational trails use). As a general rule, planning documents of this type have a usable shelf life of 5 years. As a result, there is a need to consider updating the trails plans for both OHV and Recreational Trail uses.

## Support For The Plan

During the months of October through December of 2001, OPRD staff conducted a series of regional recreation issues workshops across the state as part of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) planning process. Recreation providers from across the state expressed a strong desire for OPRD to update the Oregon State Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Study and Oregon Outdoor Recreation Trails Plan. According to these providers, the plan should examine use of all types of trails (motorized, recreational and water trails) and include the participation of state, federal, county and municipal providers and advocacy groups.

The SCORP planning effort's recreational participation study (Oregon Outdoor Recreation Survey) results also emphasize the importance of trail-related activities in the state. The study estimated statewide resident and non-resident recreation participation for a list of 76 individual outdoor recreation activities. Of these 76 activities, the most popular resident activities are running and walking for exercise (49.2 million estimated annual user days\*) and walking for pleasure (47.7 million annual user days). For non-residents (from households in Washington, Idaho, and California who lived in counties adjacent to Oregon) recreating in the state of Oregon, running and walking for exercise (10.5 million annual user days), RV/Trailer Camping (6.2 million annual user days), and walking for pleasure (5.1 million annual user days) were the most popular.

(\* A user day is one instance of participation in a single outdoor recreation activity by one person.)

Based on information gathered during the SCORP issues workshops and the Oregon Outdoor Recreation Survey, the SCORP Advisory Committee identified the development of a concurrent State OHV and Recreational Trails Plan as a key objective in order to provide an adequate supply of quality trail facilities and opportunities to satisfy a growing number of motorized and recreational trail users throughout the state of Oregon.

In addition to OPRD having a current SCORP to receive and obligate Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) under Section 206(d) of the Recreational Trails Program

legislation, the state is also required to have a recreational trails plan (motorized and non-motorized) in order to be eligible to receive and obligate Federal Recreation Trails dollars.

Finally, the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC), the Oregon Health Division, and the Oregon Coalition for promoting physical activity are currently promoting physical activity and the health benefits associated with participation in recreational trail activities. According to these organizations, a sedentary lifestyle is a major contributor to an alarming increase in major health problems such as heart disease and diabetes within the American population. The Oregon Health Division is currently developing an Oregon Plan for Physical Activity and has identified the need for more community trails as a top priority. The health division is working with CDC to develop federal funding for trail projects that would enhance other funding programs such as the Recreational Trails Program, TEA-21 grants and the Land & Water Conservation Fund. An updated state trails plan would place Oregon recreation providers in better position to access such funding.

### **Additional Information From Issues Workshops**

Public recreation providers in 8 of the 11 SCORP planning regions voted the "Need For Recreational Trails and Trail Connectivity" as a top LWCF issue. As a result, this need was identified as one of three top statewide LWCF issues for inclusion in the 2003-2007 Oregon SCORP plan.

Recreation providers reported a need for additional recreational trails including walking, hiking, bicycling and equestrian multiple-use trails. In addition, the concept of trail connectivity was supported throughout the state. Trail connectivity involves:

- linking urban trails to outlying Federal trail systems,
- linking neighborhood, community and regional trails,
- connecting community parks and other recreational and public facilities, and
- connecting neighboring communities (e.g., Ashland to Medford).

Recreation providers also felt the trails plan should address a growing interest in canoe, rafting, and kayak routes (water trails) throughout the state. Although the state enjoys a variety of high-quality paddling opportunities, additional recreational infrastructure is needed to satisfy a growing demand for paddling sports. Necessary resources/facilities/services needed for water trail development include water access sites and support facilities, overnight camping facilities, directional signage, maps, brochures and other marketing tools to properly market new water trail opportunities and paddling clinics.

Although Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) riding continues to grow in Oregon and nationally, riding areas on Federal lands continue to be closed as a result of resource concerns. Recreation providers report that cross-country OHV travel is damaging the state's natural resource base. The state needs to take a proactive approach by exercising leadership in shaping a long-term vision for OHV recreation to include:

1. changing riding patterns to avoid impacts,
2. resolving use conflicts and resource degradation, and
3. creating more designated OHV riding areas in the state.

Needed OHV facilities and services include:

- OHV trail riding areas (ATV, motorcycle and 4x4) including trails, parking areas, restrooms, tow vehicles, camping facilities, communication links to emergency services and law enforcement,
- OHV parks in reasonably close proximity to metropolitan areas, and
- designated motocross and challenge courses for motorcycles, ATV's, 4-wheel drive vehicles, mud bogging and truck pulling.

There is a concern that such riding areas be thoroughly separated from hikers, kayakers, campers, cyclists and other human-powered users of public lands and that environmental impacts be closely monitored.

Because of the role federal lands play in serving OHV riding –planning clearly requires a state/federal partnership.

### **A Concurrent State OHV, Non-motorized Trail and Water Trails Planning Process**

There are considerable benefits associated with a concurrent State OHV, Non-motorized Trail and Water Trails planning process including:

- providing user groups with comparative information to emphasize areas of common ground and understanding,
- packaging three plans into one volume, providing a one-stop planning document for recreational planners who often work on motorized, non-motorized trails/riding area planning and water trails,
- cost savings from a combined motorized, non-motorized & water trails user survey, and
- administrative and travel cost savings with conducting concurrent but separate regional issues workshops,

The purpose of the planning process will be to provide information and recommendations to guide OPRD and other agencies in Oregon in their management of motorized and non-motorized trail/riding resources. Early in the planning process, OPRD will establish separate motorized, non-motorized and water trails advisory committees to guide the statewide planning effort. Other relevant groups will also be consulted, such as The Oregon Historic Trails Advisory Committee, The Columbia River Gorge Historic Highway Advisory Committee and The National Coast Trails Association. The plans will be written primarily for recreation planners and land managers. In its component parts, it will provide background on trail user and on current trends affecting OHV, and recreational trail and water trail opportunities. The plans will be designed as an information resource as well as a planning tool to guide agencies for the next 5 years.

Specific planning objectives include:

1. Assessing the needs and opinions of Oregon's citizens as they relate to trail recreation opportunities and management (motorized, non-motorized and water).
2. Establishing priorities for expenditures from the Oregon ATV Grant Program, Federal Recreational Trails Program and other applicable sources.
3. Developing strategic directions to guide activities for the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department's ATV Program, statewide recreational trails planning and water access goals.
4. Gathering additional inventory measurement data for motorized and non-motorized trail resources and facilities to add to information gathered for the "2001 Oregon Statewide Outdoor Recreational Resource/Facility Inventory Bulletin."
5. Conducting a systematic inventory of existing and potential water trails and facilities, identifying priority needs and potential funding sources.
6. Recommending actions that enhance motorized, non-motorized and water trail opportunities to all agencies and the private sector who provide trail resources in Oregon.

The Concurrent State OHV, Non-motorized and Water Trails Plans would be completed in 2 years after final approval and necessary funding is available.