



2014 Colorado 600

September 9, 2014

OHV Manifesto

by

Mike Hawkins

mike@alpinelink.com

Riding off-highway vehicles (dirt bikes) was my favorite pastime growing up. My dad and I rode together. My friends and I rode together. We raced together. On most any weekend, starting when I was 12 years old, we were riding for fun or racing competitively—in enduros, hill climbs, flat track, and motocross. I credit dirt bike riding as a youth for building my self-esteem, keeping me out of trouble, and teaching me many valuable life lessons learned from being an athlete in a competitive sport. While no longer racing, dirt bike riding is still one of my favorite activities and something that my children and I do together as often as we can. Dirt bike riding is a great family activity that I hope we can all enjoy for generations to come.

Studies on OHV recreation find that around a quarter of the US population is involved in some type of OHV recreation. Yet in recent years many of our country's public riding areas have been closed to motorized use. While OHV recreation is a growing pastime for tens of millions of people, the availability of public lands for our use is shrinking. We are at a point now that our public lands are not very public anymore. Many parks and forests are now off limits to those of us who choose to recreate on motorized vehicles.

In defense of the land managers who have closed trails and made decisions against motorized use, there have been trails that needed to be closed. Some trails endangered our country's precious wildlife habitats and environment. There were also a few motorized users who rode irresponsibly and deserved to be banned from selected riding areas. However, these users are the exception and not the rule. Most motorized users are responsible people with many being highly respected professionals including doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, and preachers.

As a concerned citizen about maintaining abundant OHV recreation opportunities for my family and friends, I joined several others in Summit County Colorado in 2006 to resurrect an old OHV club called SCORR—Summit County Off-Road Riders. We formed the club with three objectives in mind—to:

1. Establish a common voice for our local user group.
2. Protect our right to ride on public lands.
3. Change the local perception of our user group.



To establish a common voice, we recruited club members through advertisements, booths at local events, participation in local parades, hosting of club meetings, and our website (www.SCORR.org). We also leveraged other OHV organizations such as the Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition (www.COHVCO.org) and the Colorado Trails Preservation Alliance (www.ColoradoTPA.org) to spread the word about our club.

To protect our riding privilege, we met with local, state, and national land managers including national forest supervisors, district rangers and staff, county open space managers, county commissioners, and other elected officials. We let them know about our club and our intent to promote responsible off-highway recreation on their lands. We asked for their support and offered our support to them in return.

To change the local perception that our user group was irresponsible, we instituted trail maintenance and clean up days. During the summer, we work one day a month to maintain our local trails. We promote "stay the trail" (www.staythetrail.org) riding. We volunteer to help the Friends of the Dillon Ranger District (www.FDRD.org). We educate our club members on responsible riding through our messaging and the example we set. We have a number of our members who have earned crew chief designation who lead trail maintenance projects.

As a club, our first major project was in an area called the Golden Horseshoe. This is a 6000 acre area of trails in the heart of Summit County partially located within the Breckenridge town limits. The Golden Horseshoe is jointly managed by the White River National Forest, Summit County, the town of Breckenridge, and a few private land owners. We participated in a multi-user group task force that was established to determine the fate of over a hundred miles of single track, ATV, and 4x4 trails. By participating, we were able to keep many of motorized trails as well as create a few new ones that were reroutes of existing trails considered unsustainable.

Our second major project was to replace an old user-created motocross track in the Keystone area that was located on property owned by Summit County. By working with county open space staff and the general public through a county appointed task force, we were able to reach a compromise that was acceptable to all parties. We agreed to terms in regard to time-of-day use, seasonal use, and the location of the track. We designed and built the track as a subsidiary club with membership dues to fund the management and maintenance of the track (www.tenderfoottrackclub.com).

Our 3rd major project was in an area near Keystone called the Tenderfoot Mountain that is managed by the White River National Forest. Many miles of single track trails were closed to motorized use as part of the forest service's Travel Management Planning process. We appealed the travel management plan and requested that the trails be reopened for continued motorized use. We established ourselves as a 501C3 nonprofit organization, secured grants, conducted noises studies, completed environmental assessments, and performed wildlife impact assessments. We met with elected officials, attended community open-house events, and participated in a task force with local homeowners. After several years of work and many compromises, we won approval to build 20+ miles of new trails.



There is still much more work to be done in our local community, but we are proud of what we have accomplished so far. Our club is also honored to have been awarded with two COHVCO “club of the year” awards. My colleague Chuck Ginsburg has also been honored with an FDRD crew leader “volunteer of the year” award. When I think about our success, I believe it comes down to a few key principles:

- Being proactive – not waiting for someone else to take the lead or do the work that needs to be done. Being proactive includes starting the club, recruiting passionate members, and targeting people of influence.
- Building relationships – getting to know people of influence, understanding their needs, and helping them do their jobs well. This includes working with local elected officials, land managers, and staff.
- Maintaining a common voice – pulling together a group of people with a common interest that is large enough to get work done as well as get the attention of people of influence.
- Establishing a positive image – being professional, respectful, and competent at what we do. Respecting other’s opinions, listening, and looking for win-win solutions rather than complaining.
- Persuading – selling the benefits of OHV recreation including its economic impact, value to our user group, value to families, etc.
- Assigning owners – delegating and empowering critical tasks to good people. We are fortunate to have people in our club like Fred Niggeler, Kent McGrew, Jeff Stackhouse, David Love, Mary Patterson, Tim Nixon, Rover Pederson, Stuart Bower, and Brian Wray.
- Persisting - being persistent, staying engaged, continually coming up with new ideas, and not giving up.

If you are an OHV user, you know we still have a lot of work to do. Actually, our work has just begun. We have many trails that need to be reopened, rerouted, and newly built. We have been attacked by individuals and special interest groups who have been irrational, yet influential in closing motorized access to our public lands. Let’s recognize that these groups are no more passionate about their cause than we are about ours. They are no smarter than we are. They have been winning simply because they have been more active as a user group than we have been. Let’s be honest—we have not been giving our right to ride the attention and effort that it deserves.

If you agree that maintaining our OHV riding privilege on public lands is a cause worth fighting for, join me in being more involved. Rather than be frustrated or complain about losing our right to ride on public lands, do something about it. Recruit your family and friends to become advocates for our cause. Join your local club, or create a club if one doesn’t exist. Join your state and national organizations like the TPA, COHVCO, BRC (www.ShareTrails.org), and AMA (www.AmericanMotorcyclist.com). Get to know your local land managers and help them support the building and maintenance of motorized trails.

I propose we all adopt this OHV manifesto:



OHV Manifesto

Mike Hawkins

mike@alpinelink.com

- Join** – join local, state, and national OHV organizations. Show support, be counted, and stay informed.
 - Volunteer** – volunteer time to OHV organizations. Provide the much needed help with administration, fund raising, events, and countless other activities.
 - Give** – give money to OHV organizations. When they ask, give. Help fund and sponsor events, advertising, facilities, equipment, legal defense, and other activities that support our cause.
 - Write** – write letters every time an OHV organization makes a request to do so. Your concerns and opinions are of no value if they are not communicated and counted.
 - Comment** – give feedback to land managers and elected officials every time they do something OHV related (good or bad). Provide editorial commentaries to newspapers, magazines, and online channels.
 - Show up** – be present for OHV related government hearings and task-force meetings. Rightly or wrongly, attendance at these meetings is perceived to reflect the broader public's interests.
 - Respect** – respect your OHV riding privilege. Ride responsibly. Obtain any required permits. Stay the trail. When communicating our cause, be respectful and respected by being candid, but also polite, constructive, and professional.
 - Support** – stay on good terms with land managers. Meet with them and build relationships. Make it easy for them to be supporters of our user group. Ask how you can help them be OHV advocates and help them do it. Provide housing for trail maintenance crews. Become a crew leader. Support and encourage them in their efforts to advance OHV initiatives.
-

SCORR promotes responsible off-road motorcycle recreation in Summit County, Colorado. We work in cooperation with local land managers to preserve our riding privilege and a high-quality recreation experience. We advocate good stewardship of our public lands and respect for other trail users. We can be recognized by the example we set when riding, our volunteer work in maintaining trails, and our efforts to educate other off-road motorcycle users.

www.SCORR.org