ABSTRACT

TITLE:	The Potential Effects of Off-Highway Vehicle Usage in the San Juan National Forest, Colorado
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ABSTRACT: In recent decades Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) usage has seen a significant increase on public lands. Management agencies are experiencing difficulty finding strategies to properly manage this recreation. This study is an analysis of literature based on OHV usage within the San Juan National Forest (SJNF), Colorado and its potential impacts on three main factors: environmental, social, and economic. Current land management policies were also studied, in addition to a look at the Hermosa Creek land policy, within the SJNF. Many significant themes were found throughout the review. Due to lack of data on environmental effects of OHV's within the SJNF specifically, data was reviewed on effects in forests nationwide. Environmental effects included: soil compaction, increased erosion, vegetation damage, wildlife mortality and displacement, and air/noise pollution. Results for social impacts indicate issues between motorized and non-motorized users, with the latter reporting the most conflict. Economic studies were difficult to find, but based on a study for the state of Colorado it was estimated that OHV's contributed over $700 million in related expenditures during one season. It was also estimated that for the fiscal year of 2001 the SJNF had an economic output of $5.1 million in regards to OHV. When current management policies were reviewed, it was found that the Forest Service (USFS) is aware of the many factors of OHV recreation and has policies attempting to address them. The issue, though, is creating policy that affects the greatest number for the greatest good, which is where much of the user conflict comes from. In addition to this the USFS does not have the funding to fully address the issues at hand. However, the recent policy change in the Hermosa Creek area is a great example of the direction land management could go, since many users came together to suggest designation for the area. It was concluded that completely disallowing motorized recreation is not very feasible; therefore, small steps should be taken in addressing these issues. Land management agencies should also use the Hermosa Creek example as a positive direction for land policy. Finally, one of the best things the USFS can do is educate the public through personal interactions and increased signage, to help users have an understanding and respect for others, usage policies, and especially the surrounding environment.