

Letter to the Editor

### **Forest Users, Roads and OHV Safety**

As the largest provider of outdoor recreation in the State of Idaho, the Forest Service takes seriously its responsibility for providing people opportunities to recreate responsibly in a reasonably safe environment.

The 2009 Idaho Legislature passed a law that includes a provision removing the requirement for individuals to have a driver's license to operate Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) on National Forest System roads. This change in law deeply concerns me because of the ramifications this change of law could have on the safety of people using roads on public lands managed by the Forest Service.

Some 2,612 miles of roads on the Salmon-Challis National Forest are available to highway-legal vehicles. In summer the roads can become crowded with passenger cars, RVs, trucks pulling trailers and the industry and business traffic that brings vehicles and larger trucks used by logging, mining and construction companies. Mixing cars, recreational vehicles and commercial traffic on forest roads with children and young adults that are untrained and uneducated in the rules of the road or the basic operation of their vehicles is a recipe for tragedy.

We know families enjoy the national forests together and want an experience free of conflict for their particular recreation preference. Fortunately there are abundant opportunities to achieve that balance. For example, the Salmon-Challis National Forest contains more than 800 miles of trails open to recreational motorized vehicles such as Off Highway Vehicles (OHV) and motorcycles providing access for visitors to enjoy this particular outdoor recreation pursuit. These trails are free of cars and trucks and provide a safer option for visitors to enjoy this particular outdoor recreational pursuit.

The Forest Service is working with recreation user groups, members of the State Legislature and others on modifications to the law to reduce the current safety hazard. In the meantime we ask you to please be aware of other vehicles on national forest roads. When you are out this year driving to or from your favorite camping or hunting spot you may encounter other visitors of all ages with varying experience levels and different types of motorized vehicles. Please take extra care to watch for all kinds of traffic to avoid life altering collisions on roads managed by your National Forest.

Thank you  
Sincerely,

Bill Wood  
Salmon-Challis National Forest Supervisor