

# CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS OFF-HIGHWAY MOTOR VEHICLE RECREATION DIVISION



Sustainability • Responsible Recreation • Education • Partnerships

For many Americans, getting out into nature to recreate with family and friends is an important and time-honored tradition. Motorized recreation is often part of that tradition, whether driving on backcountry roads to get to a trail or camping spot, camping in recreation vehicles (RVs), riding off-highway vehicles (OHVs) or a combination of all three. In California, many of these destinations are part of California State Parks' Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Program or are OHV areas supported through the OHMVR Grants Program.

California's OHMVR Program will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2021. Legislation, first enacted in 1971 and expanded since then, ensures that OHV opportunities in California are managed to sustain and protect areas for long-term motorized recreation. In the last four decades, the program has grown to include nine State Vehicular Recreation Areas (SVRAs), spanning 145,000 acres in northern and southern California. Along with SVRAs, OHV opportunities on federal and other lands comprise approximately 80 percent of the OHV recreation in California. This program also supports projects that provide motorized access to non-motorized recreation, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, equestrian trails, and camping.

## OHVs and OHV Recreation in California – A Brief History

Motorized off-highway recreation has been a part of American life since the automobile's inception. Spending time in nature, whether at the beach, mountains, or the desert, is an integral part of the modern lifestyle. Getting to remote areas to enjoy nature often requires specialized vehicles to traverse difficult terrain. Off-highway vehicles have been around since at least the First World War. Innovations in wheels, treads, propulsion, and drive train technology have increased the popularity of OHV recreation, diversity of vehicle types, and made the sport accessible to people of all ages and abilities.

The first mass-produced, light-duty utility vehicle was the Willy's MB Jeep® made for the U.S. Military during World

War II. The Jeep® not only became popular with the Army for its ability to get through rough landscapes, but it also became an iconic image of the war effort. Outdoor recreation boomed in popularity in the 1950s, when returning soldiers looked for affordable vacation destinations to take their growing families. The Jeep® and other four-wheel drive (4WD) vehicles like it were very popular with the public—first as surplus military vehicles and then as commercially produced vehicles sold to the public in 1945.



Honda introduced the first enduro-sport motorcycle in 1968 (also known as dual sport), which were street legal and had the ability to go off-highway. These bikes and others like it were easy to ride and inexpensive, leading to a boom in sales, motocross racing, and off-highway recreation use.

In the 1970s, companies produced the three-wheel all-terrain cycle (ATC); four-wheel all-terrain vehicles (ATVs)



followed in 1980. Because of their popularity and interest among young riders, the state government enacted helmet laws and safety education courses for both recreational off-highway vehicles (ROVs) and ATVs.

Sand rails and dune buggies became popular in the 1950s and 60s. These lightweight vehicles

with wide tires were often custom made by enthusiasts and could easily traverse beach and desert terrain.

ROVs, also known as utility terrain vehicles (UTVs) (side-by-sides), evolved from the need for a lightweight OHV for recreation and utility use. These vehicles have become increasingly popular in recent years due to their ease of operation, safety features, and ability to travel on multi-use trails.



In 2015, Hollister Hills SVRA celebrated its 40th anniversary as the first State Vehicular Recreation Area within the California State Parks system. Since 1975, California State Parks has opened nine SVRAs in northern and southern California. SVRAs offer a variety of OHV recreation opportunities for people of all skill levels and interests. Most offer amenities such as camping, trails, tracks, 4WD play areas, motorcycle and ATV safety classes, special event areas, and education programs.



## OHMVR Program History

The rise in popularity of OHV recreation in the 1950s-1960s created the desire for a wide range of recreational opportunities across California's diverse landscape. Unfortunately, there were few OHV areas available to the public. Problems arose from OHV enthusiasts operating their vehicles in unauthorized areas. In addition, unmanaged OHV recreation created the potential for erosion, affected wildlife and habitat, and created noise, water, and air quality concerns. At times, conflicts arose between OHV recreationists and non-users.

Because of the widespread public interest and concern about OHV recreation, state legislators Gene Chappie (an OHV enthusiast) and Ed Z'berg (an environmentalist) drafted legislation to balance the demand for OHV recreation with the need to protect resources. In 1971, the state legislature enacted the Chappie-Z'berg Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Law. The law was the first significant legislation to affect OHV recreation in California. It made major changes to the California Public Resources and Vehicle Codes; created a grants program to support local and federal agencies with OHV programs; established a dedicated funding source; and, provided for



the development and expansion of appropriate areas for managed and sustainable OHV recreation.

Since then, many laws have been enacted that revised the OHMVR Program to:

- expand, manage, and sustain existing OHV areas and support motorized off-highway access to non-motorized recreational opportunities;
- monitor, conserve, maintain, and restore resources;
- establish the OHMVR Division within California State Parks to administer the OHMVR Program;
- establish the OHMVR Commission to allow public input and provide program policy guidelines;
- increase funding to the OHV Trust Fund; and
- provide an education and safety program.

On January 1, 2018, the California Legislature passed Senate Bill 249 that added new regulations to the OHMVR Program, most significant of which was the elimination of the OHMVR Program "Sunset" date. The legislation included additional protocols for natural and cultural resource management, review of the 2008 Soil Conservation Standards and Guidelines, and a new stakeholder process to make recommendations to the Governor and Legislature on the future of the OHMVR Commission. Through these legislative changes, the OHMVR Program's original intent of providing well-managed, environmentally responsible, and sustainable OHV use continues to be the Program's primary goal.

## The OHMVR Program Today

As part of the Department's Transformation Process in 2018, SVRAs are now under Park Operations as part of larger comprehensive park districts organized geographically into four divisions.

The OHMVR Division's roles and responsibilities have evolved, but what remains unchanged is the mission to provide leadership statewide in the area of off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation and to otherwise provide for a statewide system of managed OHV recreational opportunities through funding to other public agencies. The OHMVR Division is responsible for all funds used for the operation of SVRAs and statewide OHV programs. Use of the OHV Trust Fund for non-OHV uses is prohibited. The OHMVR Division works to ensure quality recreational opportunities remain available for future generations by providing for education, conservation, and enforcement efforts that balance OHV recreation impacts with programs that conserve and protect cultural and natural resources.

The OHMVR Program; however, is much more than the nine SVRAs. The Grants Program provides financial support for



federal and local government agencies that provide OHV recreation. This support helps provide sustainable OHV recreation opportunities beyond State Park boundaries and on millions of acres of public lands. Grant funds also assist organizations that contribute thousands of volunteer hours to OHV recreation-related projects and programs. In addition, the OHMVR Division offers technical assistance to government agencies and non-profit organizations that provide OHV recreation on public lands.

Over the last four decades, California State Parks has become a nationally recognized leader in the management of OHV recreation as a sustainable activity. Protecting natural and cultural resources is an essential part of managing motorized recreation for long-term use. The



OHMVR Division has ongoing monitoring programs to ensure that resource impacts are identified immediately and proper resource preservation measures are established to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts. In addition, the OHMVR Division developed a best management practices (BMP) manual to provide SVRA managers and grant recipients with the

necessary guidance to minimize the impacts of erosion, sedimentation, and other non-stormwater pollutants on water quality when developing projects. The BMP manual is followed, along with the 2008 Soil Conservation Standard and Guidelines, when assessing trails, maintaining existing trails, developing new facilities, and other construction projects.

Park Operations, the OHMVR Division, and SVRA staff meet their management goals through the combined efforts of staff, local and state agencies, and stakeholder groups. OHMVR Commission meetings held quarterly provide a setting for the OHMVR Division to deliver updates on the OHMVR Program, receive guidance from OHMVR Commissioners, and hear input from the public. Government agencies also present updates on their OHV programs at the meetings, providing a view of OHV recreation throughout California. SVRA managers actively recruit volunteers and stakeholders from different interest groups to assist in restoration projects, review draft plans and projects, and make recommendations to park managers. These combined experiences foster a greater understanding of the complexities of managing an OHV recreation program in a regulatory environment.

With the increased interest in OHV recreation, the OHMVR Division has also developed a comprehensive statewide education campaign to inform the public about California's

## Jeepers Jamboree 1953

One of the first notable organized recreation Jeep® excursions in California was the Jeepers Jamboree in 1953, held on the now-famous Rubicon Trail.

The rugged 20 mile county road was once a well traveled stagecoach route in the late 1800s

that crossed the Sierra from Georgetown to Lake Tahoe. Organizers of the event included

World War II veteran Mark Smith and Gene Chappie (one of the authors of the 1971 Chappie Z Berg Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Law).



diverse OHV opportunities, safe and responsible recreation, and the importance of natural and cultural resource stewardship. The OHMVR Division supports public outreach, interpretation, and education efforts at the SVRAs, through partnerships with organizations and schools, and through the Grants Program. The OHMVR Division also collaborates with organizations that provide OHV education and recreation programs to youth in underserved areas. These programs get youth into nature, teach safe and responsible recreation, build riding skills, and foster a conservation ethos while improving their health through physical activity.

OHV recreation contributes many benefits to California and its residents, including active recreation, adventure tourism, and access to natural landscapes for disabled people and the

elderly. It is a family-friendly activity. Participants share a love and appreciation for the outdoors, enjoy connecting with nature, and volunteer their time to conservation projects in their favorite recreation areas.

The early vision of Legislators Gene Chappie and Ed Z'berg are evident in the statewide network of recreation areas, education, and resource management programs. Through partnering with other local, state, and federal land managers, the OHMVR Program's goals of providing environmentally responsible and sustainable OHV recreation has been applied to a statewide system of OHV recreation opportunities where visitors can fully enjoy California's spectacular landscape.



# OHMVR Division Mission Statement

The mission of the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division is to provide leadership statewide in the area of off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation; to acquire, develop, and operate state-owned vehicular recreation areas; and to otherwise provide for a statewide system of managed OHV recreational opportunities through funding to other public agencies. The OHMVR Division works to ensure quality recreational opportunities remain available for future generations by providing for education, conservation, and enforcement efforts that balance OHV recreation impacts with programs that conserve and protect cultural and natural resources.



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