

following detailed instructions in a trail sign plan on the site specific placement of signs, rather than as an independent contractor with discretionary authority interpreting a system-based sign standard. They were also supportive of signage approaches that made trails more distinct to riders, such as that used in the AuSable Pilot Project to highlight confidence markers.

Finally, they expressed concern about the influence of timber harvest on trail condition, mileage and maintenance. Many noted that harvest tended to straighten trails, thus reducing mileage. Also, trails were often rerouted onto forest roads, reducing the technical challenge and aesthetic value. Some suggested leaving trail corridors in tact. Other suggestions were to clearly measure the pre-harvest mileage and insure equal mileage of equal value is put on the ground nearby to reroute the trail after the sale.

### **Comments of DNR Field Personnel from Regional Workshops**

On October 14 in Grayling and October 15 in Marquette, DNR field personnel were invited to express their opinions regarding issues for the updated ORV plan. Those attending included personnel from FMFM, Law Enforcement and Wildlife Divisions.

#### **Grayling Workshop**

How the DNR integrates ORV management into its overall land management and conservation mission occupied much of the workshop. Many expressed concerns that the range of management activities at the unit level has grown while personnel resources have been static or declining. Field personnel were specifically concerned that the lack of trail analysts over the previous year (the two positions in the Lower Peninsula were vacant for much of the time) had limited their ability to effectively manage the ORV program.

There was also considerable concern about ORV damage to the environment, particularly to sensitive hillsides and riparian zones. This was heightened in the counties where all county road shoulders were opened to ORV use. Many perceived that this policy directly contributed to increased environmental damage on state owned lands, even if those lands were not posted open to ORV use. There was also concern about whether ORV rule violations were prosecuted uniformly across the state.

Restoration of environmental damage from ORV use on public lands was viewed as an important, but very time intensive activity. Field personnel were dismayed by what they perceived of as “red tape” in their efforts to access and use ORV damage restoration funds and provided examples of bypassing that system in favor of using the timber sale process to block illegal ORV access and re-vegetate eroded soils. There was strong support for greater field responsibility for administering, implementing and monitoring such environmental restoration efforts.

A number of FMFM management unit and regional personnel noted their support for an employee classification that would provide employees dedicated solely to forest recreation at the management unit level. They cited a year-round workload with snowmobile, ORV, state forest campgrounds, water access sites, rail-trails and pathways.

One suggestion from a number at the workshop to better integrate one aspect of ORV use on public lands with land management responsibilities, was to link some ORV motorcycle event locations to the timber sale program. Such events involve temporary trail that is used in a single ride or a series of rides over a week or less. Then the temporary trail is decommissioned and hopefully effaced. The suggestion was to have event trail sited at locations for near future (1-3 years out) timber harvest. The concept being that the harvest would effectively efface the trail after the event was concluded and the course would be laid out within the confines of the sale area.

### **Marquette Workshop**

Only FMFM employees attended the Marquette workshop. They tended to see more positive links between the ORV program and the rest of the DNR mission. In particular, they saw positive links among ORV routes, which benefit ORV users and snowmobilers and timber and fire efforts.

There was also support for long distance point-to-point and major loop trails to promote ORV tourism in the UP. Many had heard from constituents about local support for such venues and believed it could be a valuable part of the tourism economy and be managed in an environmentally sensitive manner.

There was concern expressed about illegal ORV use at specific sites, such as near streams where ORV users were creating illegal access to promote fishing and camping locations. Some were supporters of a “closed unless open” approach in the UP, but this was a minority opinion.

As in the Lower Peninsula, there was very strong support for management unit level personnel solely dedicated to recreation. It was envisioned that these employees would have responsibilities regarding motorized and non-motorized trails, campgrounds and water access sites. They acknowledged a year-round workload in this area and current and potential funding available for this purpose.

### **US Forest Service ORV Policy**

On July 15, 2004 the Forest Service published proposed regulations regarding ORVs (they characterize as off-highway vehicles or OHVs) in the Federal Register. It was prompted by Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth citing unmanaged recreation, including impacts from OHVs, as one of the four key threats facing national forests and grasslands.

The Forest Service notes the following highlights of the proposed rule on their website [www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/ohv/index.html](http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/ohv/index.html).

- The proposed rule would require designation of those roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicles.
- Designation would include class of vehicle and, if appropriate, time of year for motor vehicle use. A given route, for example, could be designated for use by motorcycles, ATV's, or street-legal vehicles.