

OPINION-EDITORIAL

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO ORV MANAGEMENT

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KAMLOOPS – British Columbia’s natural beauty is a tremendously important tourism and recreation asset. For many British Columbians, snowmobiling, dirt biking and riding all-terrain vehicles are exciting ways of enjoying the vast network of trails our province has to offer.

Recently, I was pleased to announce a new ORV Management Framework. This enhancement will facilitate safety, accountability and enjoyment of Off-Road Vehicles (ORVs) in B.C.

The framework will address public safety issues by requiring helmets for all, and require special safety provisions for youth, saving lives and health care resources, and preventing disabilities. New standards for mufflers will minimize the noise impact on wildlife and spark arrestors will reduce the risk of forest fires. Additional measures to designate crossings on public roads will mean ORV riders can connect with their communities and our world class trail network.

The Union of BC Municipalities, the B.C. Chamber of Commerce and the B.C. Coroners Service Child Death Review Unit are some of the groups who have asked for changes that will improve the safety and use of ORVs. There have been insufficient regulations to identify and prosecute ORV riders who destroy the environment, harass wildlife or livestock, and engage in criminal behaviour. There has been difficulty identifying stolen vehicles.

I am happy to say that we have prepared a solid blueprint for action in the ORV Management Framework. Its provisions include:

Registration:

- Registration and licensing of all ORVs at sale and resale.
- A more visible plate or decal to assist compliance and enforcement efforts in identifying irresponsible ORV riders and help track stolen ORVs.
- An expanded definition of ORV to include all terrain vehicles and dirt bikes; this will allow local governments to enact bylaws for ORVs.

Public Road Crossings:

- In order to connect our communities and trail systems, all ORV riders will be able to legally cross public roads/highways or portions of the right-of-way at designated locations with an optional annual vehicle licence and basic insurance.

- Riders who choose to stay on Crown land require only one-time registration and licensing.

Safety:

- All ORV riders must wear a helmet and use lights for low visibility conditions. Seatbelts must also be worn where installed by the manufacturer.
- Additional measures to better protect youth less than 16 years of age include: adult supervision, appropriate size machines for age/weight and reduced speed limits.

Environment:

- Improved muffler standards for ORVs will reduce noise disturbance to wildlife and recreationists; spark arrestors will reduce the risk of forest fires.
- B.C. supports the federal government's proposed emission standards for ORVs under the Marine Spark-Ignition Engine and Off-Road Recreational Vehicle Emission Regulations; once approved, these standards will apply to B.C.

Compliance and Enforcement:

- A provincial ORV compliance and enforcement strategy will be developed and will include an education component to help achieve voluntary compliance.

Implementation:

- A committee of my colleagues has been formed to oversee implementation.
- Registration and licensing costs will be based on user-pay, and comparable to other small vehicles.

ORV management in B.C. results from a great deal of discussion over many years with a multitude of interested groups. The ORV Coalition brought together conservation groups and ORV riders' associations seeking common ground. Ministry officials have been consulting with the Coalition, other government agencies and other parties to try to find a workable solution.

This framework is in response to a demonstrated need for a collaborative, responsible approach to managing the concerns of a diverse set of organizations and interests. We are very pleased with what the collaboration has accomplished; within two years we will have in place a set of regulations that will make ORV use for recreation and for business safer, more accountable – and more enjoyable.

Please visit our web site at www.tca.gov.bc.ca/ORV for more information on the ORV Management Framework.

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