



wildsight

For Immediate Release

October 1, 2009

Wildsight supports proposed off-road vehicle (ORV) legislation

Hopes it will increase public support for responsible ORV use

Kimberley, B.C. — British Columbia is one of the last Canadian jurisdictions that still allows “off-trail” off-road vehicle use, despite the well-documented risks of erosion, noxious weed spread, and wildlife disturbance.

It is also the only Canadian jurisdiction where off-road vehicle (ORV) licensing and registration is not required. As a result, there are very few rules or guidelines that inform law-abiding ORV users where they should or should not go to recreate.

That’s all about to change, if Kevin Krueger gets his way.

Krueger, B.C.’s Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, will propose new legislation governing ORV use in the province during an upcoming sitting of the British Columbia Legislature.

“Wildsight supports the Minister’s efforts to protect our backcountry and sensitive habitats from uncontrolled ORV use,” said Dave Quinn, Wildsight’s Purcell program manager. “We are looking forward to tools being established that allow a small percentage of ORV users—those who abuse wilderness areas—to face some consequences for their destructive activities on public land.”

Quinn said these are users who regularly cut gates or build trails around gates to take their machines into closed sensitive areas such as Maus Creek, Farnham Creek and Mark Creek.

“Right now, there is very little enforcement capacity,” he said. “With no license or registration, there is no way for anyone to document who is doing what, where.”

Quinn said neighbouring jurisdictions have very clear signage for areas ‘open’ to ORV use and clear signage that protects sensitive riparian, alpine, grassland and other wildlife habitats from the damage that can be caused by ORV use.

“People tend to see ATV tracks in the Maus Creek tarns,” he said, “or they see where grasslands have been torn up by motorbikes, or where new, unpermitted ATV roads have been cut into the bush, and they judge all ORV users as disrespectful.

“But in reality, only a small percentage of users are doing things like this.”

Quinn is hopeful the new legislation will help increase public support for responsible ORV use and for the ongoing trail construction and mapping that would help increase the responsible use of wilderness areas.

The Cranbrook West Recreation Advisory Committee, which brought together diverse stakeholders, from ranchers, hunters, trappers, conservation interests, and motorized recreational user groups, called for licensing and registration of ORVs in its final April 15, 2005 Recreation Management Strategy Plan.

“Cranbrook West recognized licensing and registration would be a critical step towards effective monitoring and enforcement of ORV use of our backcountry,” Quinn said. “This legislation would require licensing and registration.”

Right now, Quinn said, the damage to wilderness areas is increasing. “New, unpermitted, and poorly-designed ORV routes are appearing off the end of nearly every Forest Service Road in the district. These routes are tearing through into critical grizzly, mountain caribou, and other ungulate habitats.

“The on-the-ground results include the accelerated spread of invasive plants, erosion into watercourses and of hillsides, destruction of sensitive habitats like grasslands, alpine meadows and riparian areas, and disturbances to wildlife.”

Quinn said the Rocky Mountain Forest District has more than 18,000 kilometres of logging and secondary roads, with an additional estimated 30,000 to 40,000 kilometres of ‘non-status’ roads and trails. “It’s a world-class motorized recreation playground, no doubt about it,” he said. “But with access comes responsibility. There needs to be something in place to help protect opportunities for quiet, traditional recreation such as horseback riding and hiking, and to protect sensitive wildlife and ecosystems. We hope this legislation passes and will help achieve these goals.”

—30—

About Wildsight

Wildsight works locally, regionally and globally to protect biodiversity and encourage sustainable communities in Canada's Columbia and southern Rocky Mountain region. This area is internationally recognized as a keystone to conservation in western North America. For more information, please visit www.wildsight.ca.

Contact:

Dave Quinn, Purcells program manager
250.427.5666 or 250.427.8878 • daveq@wildsight.ca