

PRESS RELEASE

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Trail Riders Seek Stewardship Agreement

Kelowna, BC October 29th 2006 - There is a growing number of conflicts between an increasing number of off-road motorcyclists, property owners and other stakeholders. The Okanagan Trail Riders Association is on the front line when addressing these conflicts and educating off-road riders on conservation and just plain consideration of others. The OTRA has a mandate to protect riding areas through out the Okanagan Valley. The trail riders are a growing group, and in large part it is a family sport. According to Ken Umbarger, president of OTRA, 25% of all recreational off-road bikes are under 100cc for young children and in many cases parents are joining in the fun with bikes of there own.

“Frankly”, says Ken Umbarger, “most of these conflicts revolve around noise, environmental and liability issues and they will only grow if action is not taken.” The club has a plan to resolve these unnecessary conflicts.... A plan which has been tested and proven successful in other parts of Canada and the US. Recently the OTRA organized a ride to an Off Road Vehicle Park in Washington State to show its members a model of what is necessary in this Province. Over 30 riders participated on the trip and came back excited and determined to implement this plan.

This year OTRA joined with Lakeview Irrigation District (LID) and other groups like the Friends of the South Slopes to address the problems head on. Much of the year was spent in educating the off-road community and other stakeholder about what can and needs to be done. The provincial government granted \$35,000 dollars to address the immediate priorities of LID and OTRA and a good working relationship was fostered.

The OTRA believes that a well designed trail system and rider regulations are long overdue. The OTRA has applied to the Provincial government for a Stewardship Agreement of the Bear Creek area. This agreement will make provisions for a well located, designated and sustainable trail network as well as the resources necessary to develop and maintain it. Concurrently enforceable regulations are needed such as quiet mufflers, spark arrestors and in some cases closure of inappropriately placed trails. Once this plan is complete and many of these unnecessary conflicts have been resolved other areas can be addressed such as the south side of Kelowna.

Umbarger states that in many ways this issue is similar to many of the conflicts created by skateboarders in previous years. This user group needed and got designated and well designed parks that participants would willingly embrace. The numerous conflicts quickly diminished.

Off-road riders deserve no less. In fact argues Umbarger, “Just add up the sales taxes on these machines along with the road taxes on the fuel. Couple this with a tremendous shoulder season tourism opportunity and economically it is a no brainer.”

The club is attempting to raise \$250,000 by April of 2007 and an equal amount in 2008. Approximately \$20,000 of this funding will be used to hire an expert in off-road vehicle park design. Another \$100,000 will be to purchase a trail making machine to build sustainable trails and to close and rehabilitate others. The balance of the funds will be used for the actual operating cost of the equipment. On going maintenance of the completed project will be done largely on a volunteer basis and self funded through club proceeds. When taxpayers compare the cost of this project to the cost of just one soccer field and the ongoing maintenance the City funds each year the rationale is very clear. Discussions with Integrated Land Management Bureau are presently being scheduled and Umbarger plans to lobby both the City and the Regional District for support. This is a community initiative and every level of government needs to take part.

