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Problems Confronting Land Managers Relating to ORVs

The writer is an officer with the Forests Department, which manages the State forests, and a member of a group concerned with recreation on the State's water supply catchment areas.

The paper deals with specific administrative and managerial problems which arise from ORVs. Two assumptions are made, first that bonafide official vehicles are not an ORV problem and second that earth moving and logging equipment is always used according to a management plan.

Over the past 100 years, forests have been used mainly for the production of timber. In recent years they have become the subject of multiple-use planning. Forests have a multitude of uses and one of these is that they cater for a wide range of recreational activities. One of these activities, the use of ORVs is one of the least popular in terms of numbers of people.

The Forests Department has the legal authority to administer the forests and to work in conjunction with the Water Supply Authorities whose reservoirs depend on well managed catchment areas. ORVs have both direct and indirect effects on the forest environment.

Direct effects include damage and disturbance to flora and fauna; erosion; bushfires; spread of disease and traffic hazards. Indirect effects include siltation of dams; turbidity of waters leading to viral or bacterial risk; and salinity. At present, West Australia is fortunate in having a good cheap supply of potable water. Should our waters become contaminated with silt, bacteria or salt it would be extremely expensive and difficult to overcome the problem. These undesirable effects can only be increased by uncontrolled use of ORVs of any sort.

The Forests Department is usually well informed about the activities of ORV clubs and with their cooperation, can often accommodate their needs. Clubs however, only represent a minority group catering for about 10% of all ORV users. The clubs therefore are not a problem, it is the other 90% of users which the Department does not have communication with and which this Bill is intending to control. Land managers cannot predict or prepare for the majority, as users may not visit the same place twice; may choose the worst combination of season and place to drive and are likely to resist any form of restraint.

By comparing the special needs of the loner with those of other recreation users of the forest, it can be seen that loners lead to the biggest managerial problem. For example:

50 picnicians	may be catered for on 2	hectares
50 orienteers	may be catered for on 20	hectares
50 trail bike club members	require 200	hectares
50 trail bike loners	may require 2000	hectares

The trend indicates that ORV loners require a disproportionate area when compared to other types of forest users. Add to this spatial requirement the almost total lack of communication and the problem of management is obvious.

Solutions to the problem are not simple. Extensive areas of the forest must be closed at times (quarantine areas) Others can be set aside for use but only under conditions likely to be unacceptable to specific types of ORVs. No vehicle designed and built and used for "bushbashing" can be accommodated in a forest. Smaller ORVs however which can use existing tracks need not necessarily be excluded.

Some progress has been made by the Department in catering for various users. Organised motor rallies have been approved for the last four years; there is a relatively trouble-free system of approvals for events for trail and trial clubs and

and there are two areas specifically set aside for general use with four more likely in the near future.

In summary, uncontrolled use of ORVs could create extensive and expensive problems for the State. Through clubs, various ORVs can and have been catered for in the forests. Control of loners presents the major managerial problems.