



September 2015

Alberta Off Highway Vehicle Association

Position On Random Camping

ALBERTA OFF HIGHWAY VEHICLE ASSOCIATION POSITION ON RANDOM CAMPING

1.0 Introduction

The AOHVA supports effective stewardship of Alberta's public land including the need to manage random camping access and use for the protection of sensitive areas.

We also encourage and support the continuing development of the Land Use Framework for the respectful enjoyment of the back country, understanding that it is to protect the environment and wilderness for the people of Alberta not to keep it from the people.

Since 2009 the AOHVA has been advocating for an OHV Recreational Trails DAO that could fund, plan, manage and maintain trailheads and random camping spots under the proposed DAO service delivery structure.

2.0 Background (beginning with the most recent)

On April 8, 2013, the issue of random camping and attendant unruly behavior was raised in the Legislature with questions about how government intends to respond.

Negative media coverage of unruly and destructive activities by random campers and recreationists in the backcountry has unfairly resulted in a public backlash against legitimate and responsible individuals and groups who use public lands for their chosen recreational activities.

On May 10, 2012, AOHVA representatives met with government officials to further promote the need to establish a Recreation Trails DAO; once established, through infrastructure development and continuing education of users, the DAO could ensure better monitoring of off-highway recreation areas throughout the province.

To meet their need for convenient camping locations, off-highway vehicle users (members of AOHVA) have gradually developed and voluntarily maintained camping areas adjacent to staging areas and trailheads from which they access trails for their activities – a system that is working well.

Through repeated use of certain areas in the backcountry and gradual improvements by random campers to their chosen sites, there developed a sense of ownership of these public lands.

Off-highway recreational activities have experienced unprecedented growth in Alberta in the last 25 years; in fact, Alberta is the highest growth rate of these activities in Canada.

3.0 Key Points

In the 20 years since government privatized campground operations, random camping has grown along with the expansion of recreational activities that take individuals and families into off-highway areas on public lands.

AOHVA and its affiliate member clubs are not part of the problems associated with random camping; rather, with the establishment of a DAO, they can be a more effective part of the solution through education and monitoring.

AOHVA is strongly committed to respect for the environment and the responsible use of public lands for recreational purposes by all users, including campers.

Given the growth of the recreational ATV industry and other off-highway activities in the province, it is clear government does not have the resources to build sufficient limited service campgrounds to meet the increased demand.

4.0 Current Status

Individuals and families seeking campgrounds near their favourite recreational activities include fishers, equine trail riders, hikers, mountain bikers, boaters, berry pickers, dirt bike riders, ATVers and RVers, among others.

Estimates indicate that up to 70% of camping in the province is random, mostly because people seeking off-highway recreational activities cannot find campgrounds conveniently located for their pursuits.

With the growth of random camping, media have tended to unfairly link random camping with destructive and unruly behaviour.

Negative media coverage has already generated a public backlash against all off-highway activities, including those that are conducted in a responsible manner.

5.0 Options

Conduct research to select appropriate locations for limited service campgrounds and increase the number of sites.

- gives users more convenient camping options to access recreation areas

Educate the public about the need for responsible behaviour in wilderness campgrounds and during off-highway recreational activities.

- creates awareness and diminishes the incidence of destructive and unruly behaviour

Provide basic campground maintenance through contracts.

- keeps campgrounds in better condition and provides monitoring of activities

Develop an official government program to report infractions and provide penalties to address the problem.

- allows proper authorities to identify people who create disturbances and destruction on public lands and deal with them effectively to stop their activities

Develop innovative ways to fund the development of more well situated sites for random camping, especially sites that would accommodate today's extra-large RV rigs that individuals and families use for both camping and towing their off-road vehicles.

- increases the number of sites for random camping, especially for rigs that do not fit in existing campgrounds

Maintain the status quo.

- allows the problem to fester and grow, negatively affecting legitimate recreation users of public lands who conduct themselves in a responsible manner

6.0 Recommendations

Consider changing the definition of “Random Camping” in Alberta to “camping with limited services that would include a set of standardized guidelines, maintenance and monitoring programs for the environmental sustainability of the area.”

Consider developing a new government-funded category of limited service campsites in Provincial Parks that are in key recreational areas to minimize impacts to public safety and better management for environmental sustainability.

Support the concept of an OHV Recreational Trails DAO that could develop limited service campgrounds adjacent to staging areas and trailheads where users enter off-highway recreation areas.

Establish a mandatory annual random camping fee for RVs that would permit users to camp on public lands as long as they adhere to strict environmental standards – some of the fees collected could have service delivery by the proposed OHV Recreational Trails DAO.

Enable that a mandatory annual random camping fee that could be linked to a WIN card for convenience and assurance of payment by the campers.

Develop a government-funded, seasonal advertising campaign that emphasizes the responsible use of limited service campgrounds and wilderness lands (e.g., Five Easy Rules for Random Camping).

Encourage user groups to continuing educating their members to maintain the limited service campgrounds they use (note: on a volunteer basis, AOHVA club members already maintain limited service campgrounds adjacent to the trails and activity areas they use).

Consider that limited service camping areas (wilderness campgrounds) could have washroom facilities, garbage disposal and sewage dumping.

Develop an effective means of which to deal with users who do not adhere to the guidelines for the “New Limited Service Random Camping” in the province.

Establish a government program similar to “Report a Poacher” that encourages the public to report unruly or destructive behaviour to appropriate authorities so they can take action and punish offenders.