



# MINNESOTA OFF-HIGHWAY MOTORCYCLE STRATEGIC MASTER PLAN

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## Executive Summary

The mission of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is: “to work with Minnesotans to conserve and manage the state's natural resources, to provide outdoor recreation opportunities, and to provide for commercial uses of natural resources in a way that creates a sustainable quality of life.”

A core tenet of the DNR’s mission is to work with Minnesotans to provide diverse outdoor recreation opportunities that uphold the interdependent values of a healthy environment, sustainable economy and quality of life. Toward that end, the DNR helps plan, build, fund and maintain a network of trails, both motorized and non-motorized, that support outdoor recreation opportunities and experiences, economic diversification, and healthy and active lifestyles.

In 2019, the Minnesota Legislature provided the DNR with [funding](#) to conduct an off-highway motorcycle (OHM) planning project and generate this OHM strategic master plan<sup>1</sup>. The process included public engagement and encouraged coordination among interested parties. The plan analyzes opportunities and constraints within Minnesota’s OHM trail system.

The Minnesota Off-highway Motorcycle Strategic Master Plan is intended to be used in concert with the other off-highway vehicle strategic master plans and the accompanying Off-Highway Vehicle Strategic Master Plans Overview Document to help guide motorized recreation management efforts into the future. The planning process included public engagement opportunities and an in-depth partner and stakeholder engagement process. The plan concludes with a series of strategies concerning future trail maintenance and development, coordination and collaboration, policy and regulation, responding to use trends, communication, as well as education and stewardship. Importantly, the plan does not propose future trail alignments. Rather, it describes regional needs and opportunities throughout Minnesota.

Each chapter of the plan is briefly summarized on the following pages.

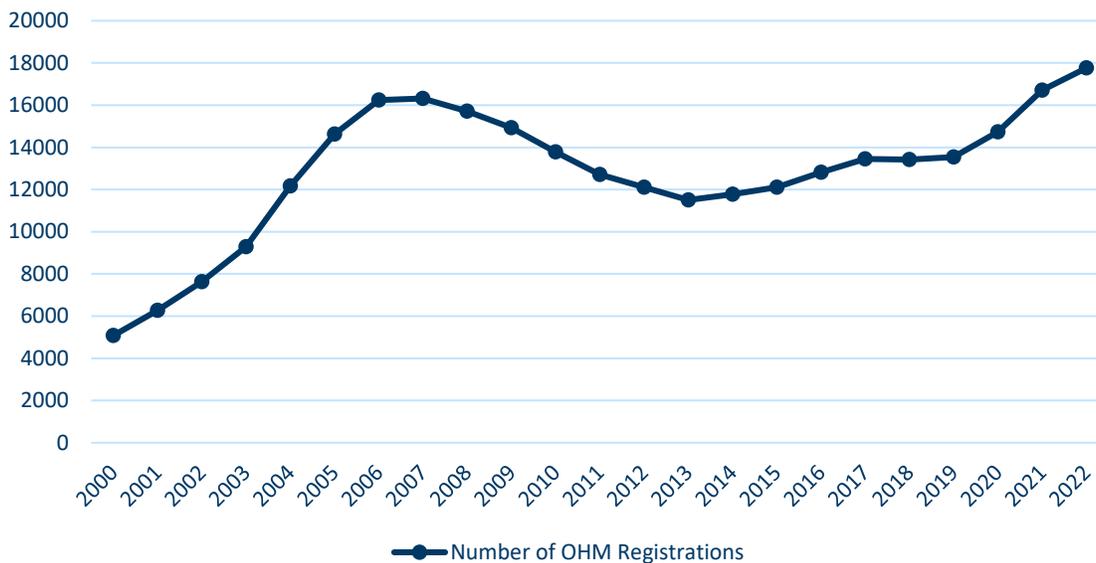
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<sup>1</sup> MN Laws, 2019

## Existing Off-Highway Motorcycle Trail System

This chapter includes information about the existing OHM trail system, including its origins, current management practices, types of trails, trail uses and user preferences. OHM registration data is used in this chapter to illustrate the trends in recreational OHM use. Information about the DNR's Off-highway Vehicle (OHV) Program, which includes OHMs, is provided, and the planning process for the DNR is discussed. Information is reviewed regarding the DNR's state forest trail designation process as well as an overview of Minnesota's Grant-in-Aid (GIA) Program. Information is also provided regarding relevant laws and policies that apply to OHM use. The chapter then reviews characteristics of OHM trails and routes.

OHM Registrations: Years 2000-2022



## Public and Local Government Engagement

This chapter examines statewide public engagement efforts for this plan. Results of public engagement processes are reviewed including, but not limited to, OHM user demographics, OHM rider preferences and desires, and input from non-OHM riders. Local government units (LGUs) were an important source of information and feedback for the strategic master plan, and information gathered from local governments is also reviewed.

## Project Development Information and Guidance

This chapter provides an overview of the project development processes the DNR uses for both types of OHM trail projects it oversees: Grant-in-Aid (GIA) trails and state-designated trails. It also outlines key elements of ongoing trail maintenance, sustainable trail design guidance and reference materials that support consistent, environmentally responsible OHM trail development across Minnesota.

## Future Strategies

This chapter describes strategies for future OHM trail maintenance and development with an understanding that there is not capacity for unlimited growth in the trail system. This chapter provides strategies for various facets of OHM trail management and development including connectivity, GIA modernization, coordination and collaboration, policy and regulation, responding to use trends, OHV communications, and education and stewardship.

## Summary

The aim is for this plan to be used by those who have critical roles in OHM trail management including DNR staff and, more broadly, those with an overall interest in OHV activity. Such partners and stakeholders include, but are not limited to, local units of government, OHM clubs, OHM riders, non-profit environmental and outdoor recreation advocacy groups, local industry, and other recreational users and user groups. This plan will be used to provide direction and guidance for OHM trail system management as well as a resource for stakeholders and partners when planning OHM trail maintenance and development.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the Plan

In 2019, the Minnesota Legislature appropriated funds for a strategic master plan for Off-highway Motorcycle (OHM) trail planning and development. The purpose of the Minnesota OHM Strategic Master Plan is to provide direction and guidance to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and partners in their efforts to plan, fund, develop and maintain a sustainable network of OHM trails that support outdoor recreation experiences, environmental stewardship, and healthy and active lifestyles. The plan examines existing OHM usership alongside current DNR planning and program operations. The plan discusses rider/non-rider preferences to identify key strategies for OHM recreation intended to minimize the potential for user conflicts and negative impacts from trail development. The plan also considers the growing demand on the current OHM trail system in Minnesota. The strategic master plan is also intended to provide important information to government units, OHM clubs and public land stakeholders/interest groups on statewide OHM trail management and strategic planning.

## 1.2 Sustainability

This plan aims to keep sustainability at the forefront. A sustainable OHM trail should allow users to enjoy riding in a safe way that also minimizes adverse impacts to the plants, animals and ecosystems they are traveling among. A sustainable OHM trail network is a system that is in balance with other recreational uses of public lands, avoids and mitigates any natural resource impacts and reflects the popularity of motorized recreation while also understanding there is a limited scope and scale of maintainability in regard to all trail systems, including Off-highway Vehicle (OHV) trails.

## 1.3 Scope of the Plan

The OHM strategic master plan has a statewide focus. Key components of the OHM strategic master planning process included engagement with OHM clubs, engagement with local government units, and gathering information regarding the existing OHM trail system and overall user experiences. Over the course of the planning processes, input was collected from OHM riders/non-riders regarding existing components of the OHM trail system.

The OHM strategic master plan was developed between 2020 and 2025. The plan was informed by interdisciplinary review within the DNR, extensive public engagement and existing conditions research. It is designed to work within current OHV trail planning processes, helping set priorities and refine projects with the goal of providing a clear planning framework for a more sustainable and complete statewide OHM trail system.

## 1.4 OHM Definition

OHMs are defined by Minnesota Statutes (M.S.) 84.787 subdivision 7 as “a motorized, off-highway vehicle traveling on two wheels and having a seat or saddle designed to be straddled by the operator and handlebars for steering control, including a vehicle that is registered under chapter 168 for highway use if it is also used for off-highway operation on trails or unimproved terrain.”

## 1.5 DNR Planning Process

### 1.5.1 DNR Mission and OHV Program Objectives

The DNR’s mission is to “work with Minnesotans to conserve and manage the state's natural resources, to provide outdoor recreation opportunities, and to provide for commercial uses of natural resources in a way that creates a sustainable quality of life.” The OHV program is one of many programs within the DNR that is tasked with fulfilling the DNR mission. The OHV program provides motorized recreational opportunities for all Minnesotans and provides funding for trail maintenance and development. The OHV program is predicated on the concept of “managed use on managed trails” which means the program aims to provide enjoyable opportunities for a broad spectrum of trail users in a manner that reduces trail user conflicts and increase compliance.<sup>2</sup>

The 2023-2027 DNR Strategic Plan outlines four broad goals that are structured around helping “sustain and build nature-based recreational opportunities, increase the health and vitality of ecological systems, strengthen communities, and support a wide range of natural resource-dependent economic activities.”<sup>3</sup> Goal 2 of the Strategic Plan envisions an outdoor recreation system that meets the needs of new and existing participants so all benefit from the outdoors.

This vision was used as a guide for review to ensure potential strategies identified during the OHM planning process support the DNR’s ongoing work within the OHV program. Key trends within public outreach and analysis were used alongside the DNR Strategic Plan to shape potential strategies for OHM use.

### 1.5.2 Minnesota DNR Planning

DNR planning processes take a number of forms, varying in their scope and application. Strategic plans like the Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan and this OHM plan are developed to provide general direction and high-level strategies. These plans focus on the development of clear goals and priorities for allocation of limited resources across recreation types and facilities in an ever-changing recreational landscape. Master plans for specific facilities, such as the Taconite State Trail, seek to accomplish similar goals but with narrower scope and deeper analysis of the factors that drive management of those facilities and the modes of recreation they support. The common goal shared by all DNR plans is to provide a framework for consistent, transparent decision-making over the life of a plan, to support implementation of the goals and priorities identified in each plan, as well as the DNR’s mission.

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<sup>2</sup> OHV Program, 2022a

<sup>3</sup> DNR, 2023

The DNR planning process emphasizes stakeholder and interested party input and makes every effort to incorporate the most reliable, up-to-date information on developments in recreation and resource management. Stakeholder and partner engagement is critical to integrating the knowledge and values of those with an interest in each plan into the final product. Stakeholders and partners who provide input on DNR recreation plans include (but are not limited to):

- ❖ Community leaders
- ❖ Park and trail users and organized groups
- ❖ DNR staff within and outside of the Parks and Trails division
- ❖ Resource managers and subject matter experts
- ❖ Conservation and environmental groups
- ❖ Community parks and economic development committees
- ❖ Tribal government officials
- ❖ Local, state and federal elected officials
- ❖ State and federal agencies (including National Forests)
- ❖ Members of the public

As important as the final plan is, the stakeholder engagement process is itself an opportunity to build collaborative relationships which can provide lasting benefits well beyond implementation of the plan.

### **1.5.3 OHV Planning**

OHV planning applies broader DNR planning framework to support riding opportunities and guide sustainable management of existing trails and facilities as well as development of new OHV trails. A new OHV trail is generally defined as one not currently enrolled in a state-managed or state-funded program, such as the Grant-in-Aid system. The planning process seeks to provide an OHV trail system that not only meets the needs of users but also minimizes impacts on natural and cultural resources and ensures OHV use exists sustainably with other land uses and recreation types.

In order to realize these goals, DNR planners take a multidisciplinary approach to identifying opportunities for strategic improvement and development of the OHV trail system. Factors that are considered are summarized in the paragraphs below.

#### **Natural and Cultural Resources**

Resource considerations play a critical role in OHV trail development and management. The planning process provides the opportunity to inventory natural and cultural resources and encourage avoidance and minimization of impacts to those resources. Natural resource considerations may include, but are not limited to, habitat, endangered and rare species, water quality, aesthetics/sound, and climate change. Cultural resources considerations may include, but are not limited to, cultural sites, earthworks, and areas of traditional cultural significance. Not all public lands are suited to OHV trails when the sustainability of natural and cultural resources are considered.

## Trail User Preferences

OHV trail user preferences evolve as vehicle technology, user demographics and trends within the sport change over time. The needs of non-OHV trail users also change over time and OHV planning considers these changes in concert with OHV trail user preferences. Public participation in OHV planning provides an opportunity for DNR to gather insights from all trail users about the kinds of riding opportunities they prefer and perceived gaps in Minnesota’s trail system.

## Terrain

Depending on the circumstances, areas with elevation change can provide high-quality, sustainable OHV riding opportunities, or they may impact natural resources in an unsustainable manner and prove too difficult to develop and maintain. Planning provides an opportunity to identify areas with terrain that is suitable for OHV trails while highlighting the need for careful trail layout and design.

## Human Environment

OHV trails exist among a mosaic of population centers, roads, public and private lands with a variety of management goals, and a whole host of other elements of the human environment, including other recreational trail users. The DNR has a responsibility to provide recreation opportunities for all trail users — the OHV planning process provides opportunities to assess how OHV use interacts with, and could be enhanced by, various human elements.

## Land Ownership

Most OHV trails traverse public lands with trails across private land or local roads acting as connecting routes. The availability of public land suitable for OHV use is an important consideration of trail development opportunities and is considered alongside DNR’s responsibility to provide diverse recreation opportunities.

Trail planning, design, construction, maintenance and management are all important, interconnected processes that contribute to a high-quality OHV trail system. Planning provides critical baseline information and insights that guide the other processes.

### 1.5.4 DNR State Forest Trail Planning

State forests are some of the most popular OHV recreation destinations in Minnesota. OHV riding opportunities range from single-track OHM trails to forest roads that support a wide range of motorized recreation. In the mid-2000s, DNR embarked on a planning process, referred to as Phase I Forest Trail Planning, through which all state forests were designated as Closed, Limited or Managed for OHV recreation. These designations were as follows:

- ❖ Closed Forests: OHV use would not be allowed.
- ❖ Limited Forests: OHV use would be allowed only on designated routes.
- ❖ Managed Forests: OHV use would be allowed on all routes unless signed as closed.

Phase I Forest Trail Planning also included designation of some of the existing routes in Limited and Managed forests as open or closed for Off-road Vehicle (ORV), All-terrain Vehicle (ATV) or OHM use or a combination thereof. Non-motorized trails, such as equestrian routes and hunter walking trails, were also designated through this process.

Phase II of the Forest Trail Planning process, which is ongoing, is an opportunity to take a closer look at each state forest or specific units within each state forest to designate new trails or uses, close unsustainable trails and reroute trails that would benefit from alignment changes.

The objectives of forest trail planning are:

- ❖ Close unsustainable trails where impacts cannot be avoided or mitigated.
- ❖ Connect trails to other destinations, local communities and existing trails.
- ❖ Provide a variety of experience levels.
- ❖ Avoid ecologically sensitive areas.
- ❖ Address major safety concerns and user conflicts.
- ❖ Identify and evaluate potential new trail opportunities.

More information on forest trail planning can be found on the DNR's [Forest Trail Planning webpage](#).

## 1.6 Strategic Master Planning Process Participants

A number of individuals and groups were involved in the creation of this strategic master plan, both within and external to the DNR. Examples of their involvement include developing and reviewing the plan, participating in stakeholder and partner engagement, and participating in an electronic questionnaire.

### 1.6.1 DNR Divisions and Minnesota IT Services

This strategic master planning project was led by OHV planning staff in the DNR's Division of Parks and Trails. There was additional participation from Parks and Trails regional acquisition and development specialists as well as ecologists, forest health specialists, environmental review specialists, land managers, and other subject matter experts from the following divisions and departments during various stages of the planning and review processes:

- ❖ Ecological and Water Resources
- ❖ Enforcement
- ❖ Fish and Wildlife
- ❖ Forestry
- ❖ Lands and Minerals
- ❖ Operations Section
- ❖ Minnesota IT Services (MN.IT)

## 1.6.2 Consultant Team

The DNR retained the services of UP! Outside, a consultant group that specializes in recreation project management. UP! Outside conducted public and local government engagement for this plan.

## 1.6.3 Partners and Stakeholders

The Amateur Riders Motorcycle Association (ARMCA) and its local OHM rider clubs were involved in community engagement for this project. Engagement included promoting opportunities for riders and non-riders to provide input regarding OHM trails in Minnesota. A variety of county governments, townships and other municipalities also have a role in OHM activities in Minnesota. Local government units (LGUs) were consulted throughout the development of the strategic master plan. More than 80 LGUs throughout Minnesota were invited to participate in initial scoping for the OHM plan.

Members of the public, including interest groups and partners not listed above, were invited to participate in scoping and the planning process for this strategic master plan. A public news release was sent out providing key information about the planning process and inviting anyone interested to participate by filling out a questionnaire, providing written comments to the DNR, or requesting additional project information. A comprehensive list of stakeholders and interested parties invited to participate, including local and federal governments, is included in Appendix A.

## 1.7 OHM Strategic Master Plan Public Engagement

A project website was created by the project consultant and was active during initial public engagement for this plan. The website included information about the project, upcoming opportunities for engagement and public materials for review.

A public engagement questionnaire was used to identify OHM use patterns, rider preferences and desires, opportunities for improvement, and management and planning input. This questionnaire was available for both OHM riders and non-riders to provide feedback about their vision for the future of the OHM trail system. The questionnaire was open for 3 months from November 23, 2020, to February 15, 2021. In addition to public engagement, six separate conference calls were scheduled and over 80 LGUs were invited to provide insight regarding the current OHM trail system in Minnesota and future OHM trail system needs.

ARMCA and local clubs were important project partners throughout the planning process. The consultant and DNR staff engaged regularly with ARMCA and local clubs to better understand ARMCA's priorities for the future and to get feedback from ARMCA representatives. Club members also contributed information and helped to identify OHM trail system needs.

## **1.8 How to Use This Plan**

### **1.8.1 All Readers**

The OHM strategic master plan is intended to serve as a foundational document for OHM trail management, development and funding priorities in the state of Minnesota. It represents the best available data on the existing OHM trail riding opportunities and the existing management policies and procedures that apply to OHM recreation. It is intended to create shared language and understanding of OHM trail management that can serve DNR staff, local units of government, local recreation providers, OHM clubs, public land users and others who work with OHM groups and riders within the state.

### **1.8.2 MN DNR and OHV Program Staff**

The OHM strategic master plan is intended to support and inform the ongoing work of the DNR and its OHV program staff regarding OHM trail management. While much of the background information included in this document is fundamental to the day-to-day operations of the DNR and OHV program staff, the strategies in the Future Strategies chapter can help inform future management and decision-making.

### **1.8.3 Stakeholders and Partners**

The OHM strategic master plan is intended to summarize the current OHM trail system effectively and accurately and to identify opportunities to enhance the functionality of the existing system, with specific attention to the needs of both OHM users and other public land users. This document may also help OHM clubs and local OHM users initiate grant-in-aid (GIA) projects and learn about trail design and maintenance guidelines.

The OHM strategic master plan is intended to create value for anyone either directly or indirectly involved in OHM trail maintenance and development, or any individual or group interested or involved in OHM recreation. The plan outlines standardized processes for management and development, creating a common language for future analysis, enforcement and engagement. For example, the project development flowcharts in Chapter 5 are aimed at clarifying the OHM project development process to make it easier for all parties to track OHM projects through each stage of development, signaling when and how various partners can engage in the process (DNR, local/county government, community organizations, tribal partners, user groups, tourism, etc.). In particular, the plan offers practical tools to help clubs and local governments align with DNR expectations for planning, apply for GIA funding, and partner effectively with DNR staff throughout each phase of trail development and maintenance. A key aim of the OHM strategic master plan is to provide clarity and transparency to all stakeholders and partners so they all can have constructive and on-going dialogue around improving processes and collaboration throughout the state.

## 2 Existing OHM Trail System in Minnesota

### 2.1 History of OHM Use in Minnesota

OHM enthusiasts started participating in recreational OHM activities in Minnesota as far back as the 1930s. Several clubs were formed in the 1930s-1960s, and many OHM clubs are still active in Minnesota. In 1969, ARMCA was formed, consisting of affiliate clubs and individual members. In 1974, ARMCA became a chartered organization of the national American Motorcyclist Association (AMA). Through ARMCA and the AMA, Minnesota hosts several events each year for OHM enthusiasts, ranging from smaller family trail rides to motocross events on specialized private tracks. Partnering with ARMCA and local clubs, OHM enthusiasts have worked with land managers to create riding areas throughout the state of Minnesota.

### 2.2 Current OHM Trail System Management

#### 2.2.1 OHM Registration Growth

In 1993, the Minnesota Legislature created the OHM registration program, which requires OHM owners to register their vehicle with the state (M.S. 84.794). Registration is valid for three years. Unlike other dirt bikes, dual sport and adventure motorcycles can be ridden off-highway and on public roads and therefore have titles and license plates and are registered by the Department of Public Safety. Non-residents of Minnesota who ride on OHM trails in the state are required to purchase a non-resident trail pass if the motorcycle in use is not already registered in Minnesota with the DNR.

Figure 1: OHM Registration Trends

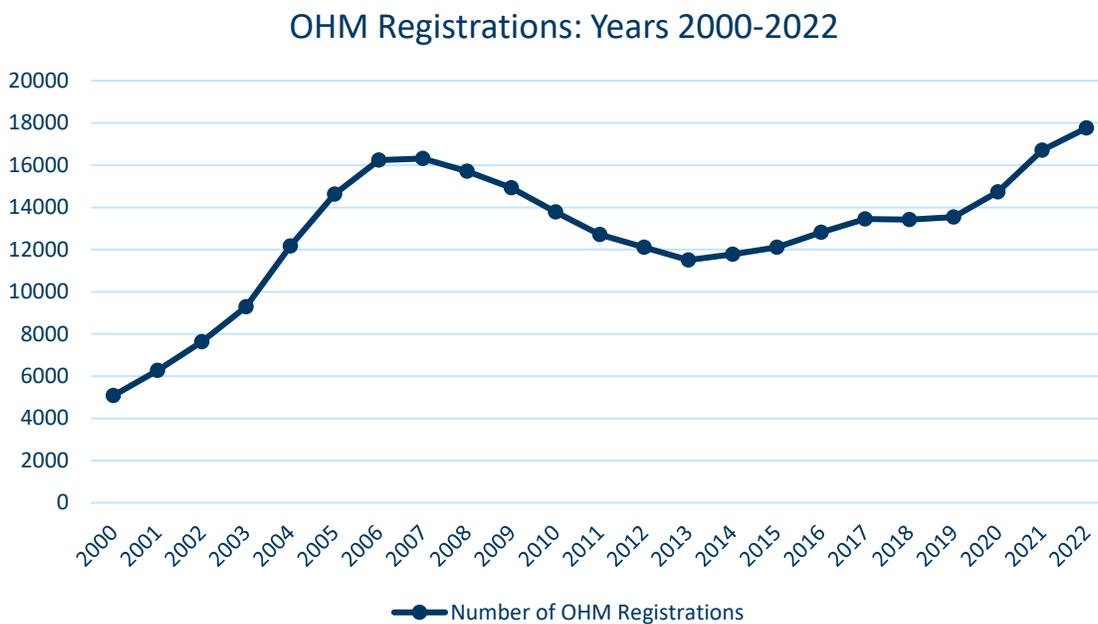


Figure 1 above shows OHM registrations from 2000 to 2022. In 2019, there were 13,548 OHM registrations in MN. In 2020, the total number of registrations increased to 14,734. OHM registrations continued to increase through the following years, with a total of 17,758 registrations in 2022.

Environmental advocates have expressed concern regarding the impacts of OHVs/OHMs on soils and vegetation, user conflicts and sound impacts of OHVs on other recreationalists and wildlife, pollution from vehicle exhaust and the role of OHMs in erosion, and the spread of invasive plant species. Illegal uses have had negative impacts on environmental resources. In response, agencies such as the DNR have made concerted efforts to avoid trail construction in environmentally sensitive areas, to provide guidance on sustainable trail construction in order to minimize impacts,<sup>4</sup> and promote environmental stewardship through partnership with organizations such as Play Clean Go and Tread Lightly! For more on these stewardship initiatives, see the Policy and Project Development sections.

Figure 2 shows where registrations are located by county. Notably, registrations in the state are concentrated in the Twin Cities metro area, DNR's Central Region and St. Louis County (Duluth area). Nearly 49 percent of Minnesota resident OHM registrations are from Central Region residents (A [map](#) of DNR's administrative regions is available on the DNR website). However, this region has relatively low rates of registration per capita (see Figure 3).

When OHM owners register their motorcycles, they are asked to name the county where they most use their OHM. Figure 4 shows the number of people who list the county as their county most used relative to number of OHMs registered in that county. For example, in 2020, while 696 Ramsey County residents have registered OHMs, only 162 stated that they most frequently use their OHM in Ramsey County. Counties with a ratio above 100 percent — such as Hubbard County, Cass County, Aitkin County and Pine County — are destinations for OHM riders, while counties with lower ratios — including Ramsey County, Le Sueur County and Mille Lacs County — have residents that often travel out of the county for OHM recreation. This information is included to help illustrate the relationship between where riders live and where they ride, which can inform future planning and investment in trail opportunities across the state.

In addition to internal staffing and external partnerships, the OHV program collaborates closely with other DNR divisions and units, including the Environmental Review Unit, which administers the DNR's obligations under the environmental review requirements of Minnesota Statutes Chapter 116D (Minnesota Environmental Policy Act, MEPA) and Minnesota Rules Chapter 4410. This collaboration helps ensure that OHV trail development and management align with state and federal environmental review requirements.

The Environmental Review Unit plays a key role in evaluating proposed projects under MEPA. Its role includes determining what level of environmental review is required and coordinating the review process with relevant programs to identify potential impacts and measures to mitigate them through project design, permitting or other means. Through this and related interdivisional partnerships — including coordination with programs that administer the Wetlands Conservation Act (WCA), the Minnesota Endangered Species Act and the Public Waters Work Permit Program — the DNR works to ensure that OHV projects meet environmental standards, protect natural resources and support sustainable recreation across Minnesota's public lands.

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<sup>4</sup> Conservation officers are charged with enforcing the noise-emission standards for vehicles found in [Minnesota Rules, part 6102.0040](#), subp. 4.



Figure 2: Minnesota OHM Registration Locations (2020)

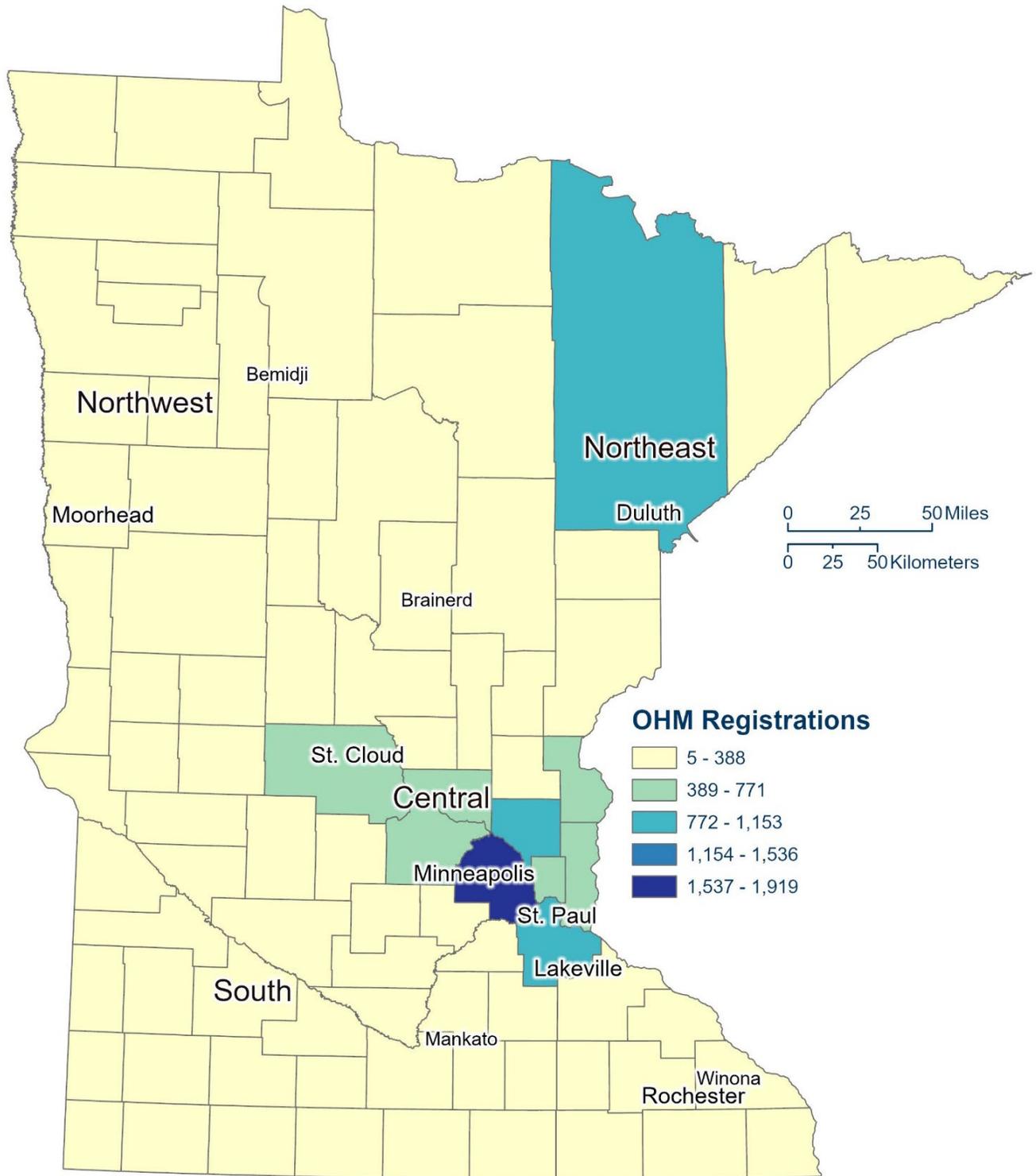


Figure 3: 2020 Minnesota OHM Registration Per 10,000 County Residents (2020)

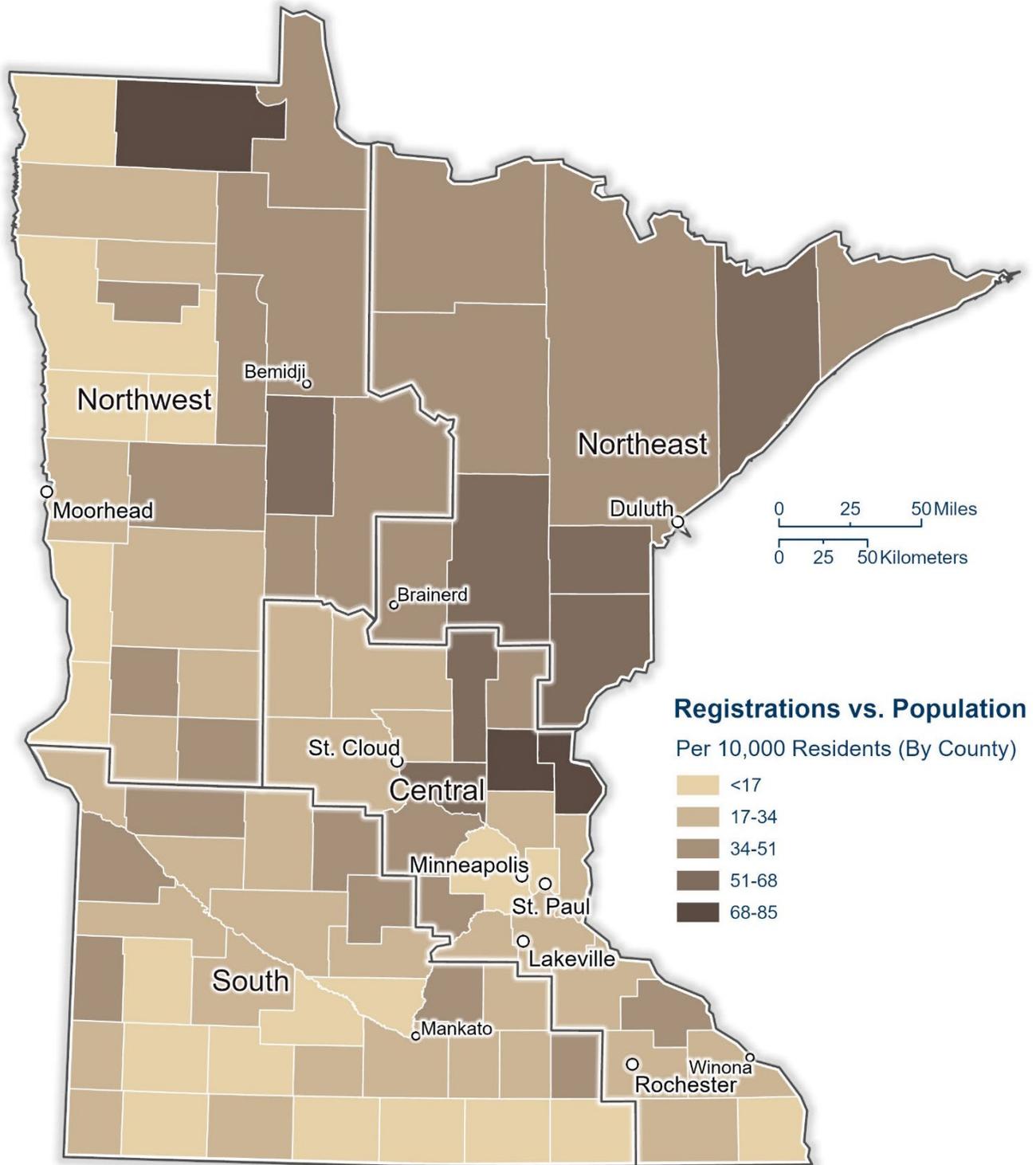
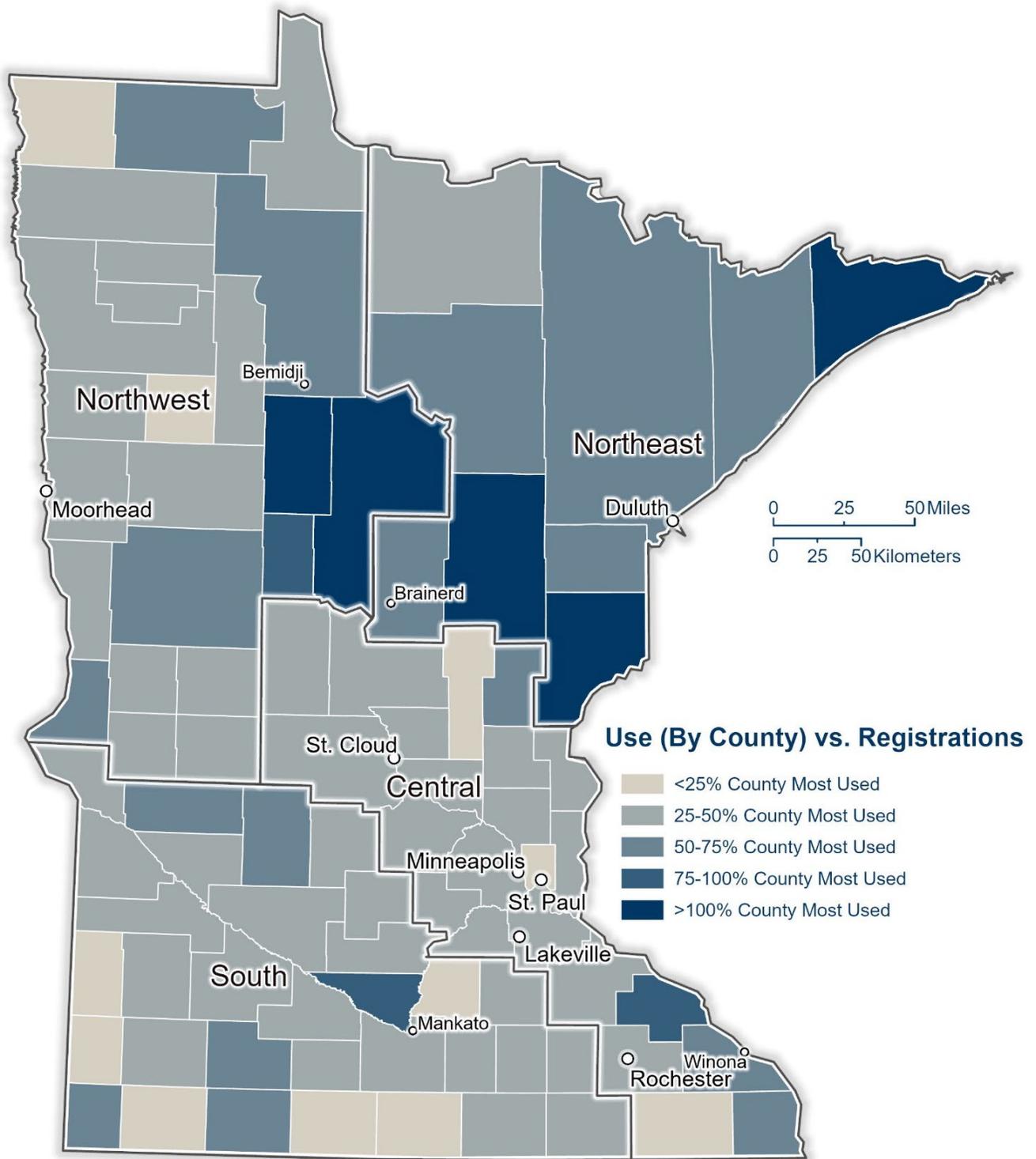


Figure 4: Minnesota OHM County of Use Relative to Registrations (2020)



## 2.2.2 Trail Ambassador Program

The [Trail Ambassador \(TA\) Program](#) is an important component of the DNR's OHV Program, supporting safe and responsible riding across Minnesota's designated trail systems. Established through legislation in 2007 ([MS 84.9011](#)) and managed by the DNR Division of Enforcement in collaboration with Parks and Trails and Forestry, the program trains volunteers to educate trail users, monitor trail conditions and promote environmental stewardship. Trail Ambassadors receive formal training in OHV laws, program policies, volunteer expectations, risk management, trail monitoring, [invasive species identification](#), GPS use and effective public engagement. This volunteer-based program plays an important role in fostering positive trail experiences and helping protect Minnesota's natural resources.

## 2.2.3 OHM Program Funding and Policy

### Program Funding

OHM program funding in Minnesota is provided through the OHM account of the Natural Resources Fund (M.S. 16A.531, Subd. 2). The OHM account funds OHM program management, trail maintenance and development (GIA as well as trails maintained by the DNR), and enforcement, which includes conservation officers and sheriff patrols. Expenditures in this account have increased significantly since 1999 from \$133,794 in 1999 to \$470,376 in 2023. This growth in OHM program funding is generally in line with the growth experienced in registrations and usership experienced over this same period (see Figure 1).

### Gas Tax Summary

In Minnesota, the price for each gallon of gasoline sold includes the state gasoline tax. In 2022, Minnesota's gas tax rate was 28.5 cents per gallon. Gas tax revenue from highway fuel consumption is deposited into the Highway User Tax Distribution Fund for construction and maintenance of transportation infrastructure including roads, bridges, highways and railways. Gas tax revenue attributed to unrefunded non-highway fuel consumption<sup>5</sup> is then distributed to specific accounts within the Natural Resource Fund. The percentage that the OHM account is allocated is outlined in state statute and was determined using a formula that considers factors such as the number of registered OHVs and the number of miles traveled in a typical outing.<sup>6</sup> The OHM account is allocated approximately 0.046 percent of revenue from the Highway User Tax Distribution Fund.

### Off-Highway Vehicle Grant-in-Aid Program

Minnesota's OHV Grant-in-Aid (GIA) Program is a cost-share program that facilitates the development and maintenance of OHV trails.<sup>7</sup> The program is funded by vehicle registration fees, trail pass fees and gas tax appropriations. GIA proposals are required to have a local government sponsor support and participate in project development. Proposals can include trail development and maintenance projects as well as site planning, trail improvement projects and land acquisition. Proposals for new trails are accepted by the DNR year-round and considered on a rolling basis. Maintenance proposals for existing trail systems are due annually

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<sup>5</sup> Unrefunded non-highway fuel use is a portion of the gas tax that is attributed to non-highway purposes, such as agricultural and recreational vehicles, which is determined by M.S. 296A.18.

<sup>6</sup> Apportionment Of Tax; Deposit of Proceeds, 2021

<sup>7</sup> OHV Program, 2022b

by November 30. More information about the proposal process is available in the [Off-Highway Vehicle Grant-in-Aid Manual](#) found on the DNR website. The manual outlines the application process for existing trails — as well as new trails — riding areas or reroutes greater than one mile. The manual also provides information on fiscal management and allowable expenses.

In 2021, the DNR started an improvement process to review the GIA program and make sure it was working well for all involved. The improvement review included engagement with OHV organizations, club members, local governments and other stakeholders and partners (e.g., non-motorized trail user groups, conservation groups) to identify what could be improved. Outcomes of this process include updated reimbursement amounts that better reflect existing construction and maintenance costs as well as the addition of an application for winter trail grooming, plowing and maintenance costs.

### Off-Highway Vehicle Regulations (2024)

The 2024 OHV Regulations document summarizes state laws and rules related to OHV operation and management in Minnesota and aligns with the objectives and priorities of the DNR OHV program. These include preventing the spread of [invasive species](#), safety considerations and education, protection of wetlands and other sensitive areas, minimizing user conflicts and promoting sustainable, sanctioned uses of OHVs. The regulations document also summarizes relevant OHV regulations and general operation restrictions. In addition, the document outlines limits on OHV use for certain geographic areas, including the seven-county metro area, state forests and the Chippewa and Superior National Forests. These laws and restrictions provide an important regulatory framework that informed the development of this strategic master plan.

### Relevant State Statutes

#### **Minnesota Statute (M.S.) Section 84.777 Off-Highway Vehicle Use of State Lands Restricted**

This statute prohibits the unrestricted use of off-highway vehicles on state land administered by the commissioner of natural resources as well as state forest land administered by a county. On certain state lands, OHVs are to travel only on trails designated, posted and mapped for OHV use.

#### **M.S. Section 84.780 Off-Highway Vehicle Damage Account**

This statute created an account in the natural resources fund dedicated to the repair or restoration of property “damaged by the illegal operation of OHVs or the operation of OHVs in an unpermitted area.”

#### **M.S. Section 84.788 Registration**

This statute outlines the registration requirements for OHMs. Unless exempted, a person may not operate, and an owner may not give permission for another to operate an OHM within the state unless the vehicle has been registered with the commissioner of natural resources or is exempt from registration. This statute also outlines the process for dual registration — vehicles registered both as an off-highway motorcycle and a motorcycle for use on public roads and highways.

### **M.S. Section 84.789 Sound Emissions**

This statute outlines requirements for OHMs operating on state land to be equipped with a silencer or another device that limits sound emissions. The statute also outlines acceptable decibel levels for OHM sound emissions.

### **M.S. Section 84.791 Education and Training**

This statute established the DNR responsibility to implement a comprehensive OHM safety and education training program for the public.

### **M.S. Section 84.793 Youthful Operators**

This statute outlines prohibitions on youthful operators including, but not limited to, the requirement of a safety certificate for operators six years or older but less than 16 years of age; the requirement of helmets for operators under 18 years of age; the requirement of a valid driver's license for operators along or on a public road; and outlines additional prohibitions for operators under 12 years of age, among other prohibitions.

### **M.S. Section 84.794 Off-highway Motorcycle Accounts**

Fees from the registration of OHMs and the unrefunded gasoline tax attributable to OHM use are to be deposited in the state treasury and credited to the OHM account within the Natural Resources Fund. Funds may be spent on administration; enforcement and implementation of statutes; acquisition, maintenance and development of trails and use areas; GIA programs; and enforcement and public education programs to law enforcement agencies.

### **M.S. Section 84.7945 Nonresident Use**

This statute states that nonresidents may not operate an OHM on a state or grant-in-aid OHM trail unless the operator carries a valid nonresident OHM state trail pass or the OHM is registered in the state.

### **M.S. Section 84.795 Local Regulation**

This statute outlines prohibitions on operating OHMs in public road rights-of-way; conditions for crossing public road rights-of-way; general operating requirements for OHMs; prohibitions related to operating under the influence of alcohol, operations on airports and organized contests; as well as regulations adopted by political subdivisions such as counties, cities or towns.

### **M.S. Section 84.9011 Off-Highway Vehicle Safety and Conservation Program**

This statute authorizes "a program to promote the safe and responsible operation of OHVs in a manner that does not harm the environment" to be administered by the Commissioner of Natural Resources.

## **2.2.4 National Forest Motorized Vehicle Use Guidance**

Many OHV trails in Minnesota are either adjacent to, cross, or are proposed on federal lands. The sections below provide overviews of key US Forest Service policies that affect OHV trails on federal lands in Minnesota. These trends and objectives are particularly relevant to this strategic master plan, which seeks to identify areas of opportunity and suitability for OHM trail development.

## Chippewa and Superior National Forest Plans (2004); 2017 Chippewa National Forest Monitoring and Evaluation Report; 2017 Superior National Forest Monitoring and Evaluation Report

The state of Minnesota contains two national forests, the Chippewa National Forest (CNF) and Superior National Forest (SNF). Both national forests contain land important for habitat connectivity and scenic resources important for recreation. The Chippewa National Forest Plan and Superior National Forest Plan, both adopted in 2004, provide an overview of existing natural resources and describe desired future conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines for the national forests' natural and cultural resources. The forest plans analyze the current management for each forest and outline management directions for specific management areas "to ensure that ecosystems are capable of providing a sustainable flow of beneficial goods and services to the public."<sup>8</sup> The plans list desired conditions, objectives and standards for various motorized and non-motorized uses of the forest, including Recreational Motor Vehicles (RMVs). RMVs include ATVs, OHMs and ORVs<sup>9</sup>. The plans allow for a maximum of 90 additional OHV trail miles to the designated national forest trail system<sup>10</sup>. These management recommendations were informed by multiple management tools.

In the management of both the Chippewa and Superior National Forests, there is a long-standing effort to reduce the overall road network through the decommissioning of roadways within the forests. For example, in the CNF, there is an objective to decommission and close roads "not necessary for long-term resource management." In the CNF, 200 miles of road were decommissioned between 2007-2017, fulfilling Objective-TS-8 in the 2004 Chippewa National Forest Plan. About half of the miles decommissioned within the CNF occurred between 2014 and 2017. In the SNF, 105.6 miles of road were decommissioned between 2009 and 2017. Importantly, only some of these roads are open to public use as many are service roads. However, this trend toward decommissioning reflects an overall desire to maintain a "minimum road system" within the forests, particularly in the CNF. US Forest Service surveys also show a significant decrease in recreation use of Chippewa National Forest between 2007-2017.

### Travel Management Planning on National Forests

In 2005 the U.S. Forest Service established a roads management strategy when the Travel Management Rule was enacted. The goal of the road management strategy is to identify a transportation system that is both environmentally and financially sustainable in relation to each forest's function and operation. Under these rules, each National Forest System (NFS) unit must identify a minimum road system (MRS) necessary to support safe and efficient travel, administrative functions, and the utilization and protection of NFS lands within the forest.

Through the identification of an MRS, a Travel Analysis Process (TAP) is needed. The TAP identifies various opportunities in which each specific national forest can meet current and future management objectives

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<sup>8</sup> Forest Service, 2004

<sup>9</sup> The U.S. Forest Service defines an off-highway vehicle (OHV) as "any motor vehicle designed for or capable of cross-country travel on or immediately over land, water, sand, snow, ice, marsh, swampland, or other natural terrain" ([36 CFR § 212.1](#)). An all-terrain vehicle (ATV) is defined as "a type of off-highway vehicle that travels on three or more low-pressure tires; has handle-bar steering; is less than or equal to 50 inches in width; and has a seat designed to be straddled by the operator" ([Forest Service Manual 7705](#)).

<sup>10</sup> [O-RMV-1 of the Plan \(O-RMV-1, page 2-43\)](#) for Superior National Forest and [O-RMV-2 of the Plan \(O-RMV-2, page 2-42\)](#) for the Chippewa National Forest

through providing information that incorporates ecological, social and economic concerns into existing and future road-related decisions. In doing this TAP, each forest is required to complete a Travel Analysis Report (TAR). This TAR helps the forest service determine subsequent National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decisions, site-specific road-related projects, and cumulative impacts related to the entire transportation system. The TARs are suitable for 20-year planning before re-assessment and analysis needs to take place.<sup>11</sup>

The public facing documents of the TAP and TARs are Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM). These maps identify roads, trails and areas open to motor vehicle use by vehicle class and time of year. They are accessible through the specific forest's website.

### Chippewa National Forest, Forest-wide Travel Analysis Report (2015)

The process to create a Forest-wide TAR is extensive. For the CNF, it involved a 13-year long process. The process included a Forest-wide Roads Analysis in 2002, a Forest Plan Revision in 2004, an Off-Highway Vehicle Road Travel Access Project in 2006–2007, publication of Motorized Vehicle Use Maps in 2008, a Watershed Condition Framework in 2011, a pilot study of 20 randomly selected roads using a TAP spatial tool in 2012, and final production of the TAR in 2015. All of the studies that were completed prior to the 2015 publication helped inform and determine opportunities and needs as identified in the TAR.

The TAP to produce the TAR for the CNF consisted of six specific steps: setting up the analysis; describing the situation; identifying issues; assessing benefits, problems and risks; describing opportunities and priorities; and reporting findings. The framework the TAR utilizes to differentiate roads within CNF system is a 'road maintenance level.' The road maintenance level is separated into five different categories, with five being roads that are maintained to the highest degree of user comfort and one being basic custodial care (mostly closed roads). The category that OHMs fall into would be road maintenance level two — high clearance vehicles. There is a total of 1,692 miles of these routes within the CNF system; however, the Soo Line Trail is the only designated motorized trail for OHV use within the CNF system. This trail connects Cass Lake to Remer and then extends from the forest to Moose Lake, MN.<sup>12</sup>

### Superior National Forest Forest-wide Roads Study Report (Travel Analysis Report) (2015)

Similar to the CNF, an extensive process took place to complete the TAR for the SNF, starting with a Forest-wide Roads Analysis completed in 2002. The TAP process to produce the TAR for the SNF consists of the same six steps that the CNF TAP does. The outcome of the TAP serves as a list of potential opportunities for how certain aspects of the forest transportation system are managed to address both administrative and public issues and interests. Additionally, similar to the CNF, the SNF categorizes roads based off of a road maintenance level on a scale of one to five. These trails are identified on the eight different MVUMs for the forest. There are a total of 984 miles of road maintenance level two roads, designed for high-clearance vehicles, that may be appropriate for OHM use. There are also no designated motorized areas in the forest. The Forest Service noted in a 2015 report that funding levels made it hard to implement management objectives and improvement projects related to road and travel needs.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Forest Service, 2005

<sup>12</sup> Forest Service, 2015a

<sup>13</sup> Forest Service, 2015b

## Chippewa and Superior National Forest Plans Motorized Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM)

The US Forest Service updates MVUMs for the [Chippewa](#) and [Superior](#) National Forests on an annual basis. These maps, which are segmented into regions, are available online for OHV users to consult when planning a trip to one of Minnesota's national forests.

## 2.3 OHM Trails, Uses and Desired User Experiences

### 2.3.1 OHM Trails

OHM trails in Minnesota vary in both use and administration. Some trails are multi-use, while others are designated for specific uses. Administration may be handled by the DNR, by local sponsors such as counties, cities or townships through the Grant-in-Aid program, by local governments outside the program, or by private entities.

OHM trails are commonly categorized as either single-track, dual-track or riding tracks. OHM single-track trails are characterized by a narrow width (approximately 12 to 48 inches) and are typically designated for OHM-only use. OHM dual-track trails are wider (approximately 36 to 72 inches) and are commonly shared with other users such as ATV riders, equestrians or hikers. OHM riding tracks are typically small acreage areas — commonly private facilities — that host OHM events and riding.

### 2.3.2 Other OHM Uses

While this plan focuses on OHM trails and recreational trail riding, there are other forms of OHM riding enjoyed in Minnesota. The list below explores some of these uses in more detail.

#### Dual Sport and Adventure

Dual sport and adventure OHMs are forms of motorcycles that are designed to ride on both paved and unpaved surfaces. Dual sport motorcycles are usually lighter and narrower in build than adventure motorcycles. Dual sport and adventure motorcycles are both highway licensed vehicles (HLV), but they can also ride recreational trails off road as they are built to handle natural surfaces.

#### Trials

Not to be confused with riding on trails, trials riding uses specialized motorcycles. Trials motorcycles typically do not have a seat, as most riding is done while standing. These motorcycles are lightweight and designed for maneuverability. The goal of trials riding is to navigate a trials motorcycle through a series of obstacles and tight paths while maintaining balance.

#### Motocross

Motocross riding is a competitive racing activity, typically held on private tracks, in which up to 40 motorcycles race together on a dirt course featuring jumps, corners and whoops — a series of evenly spaced bumps found on straight sections of the track.

## Flat Track

Unlike motocross tracks, where jumps and whoops are predominant features, flat tracks are true to their name. Flat track racing is a competitive motorsport commonly held on private tracks. Races take place on flat courses that are typically oval- or bean-shaped.

## Hill Climb

Hill climb events are competitive in nature and are commonly held in privately owned areas. Riders accelerate up steep hills that often include ridges, bumps or other natural obstacles. Depending on the hill's size and difficulty, riders either attempt to reach the farthest point up the hill or to ascend the hill in the fastest time.

## Enduros

Enduros are a family of races in which riders do not compete head-to-head at the same time. Instead, competitors start in small, staggered groups. Enduros are typically time-based events and are commonly held on off-road trails.

## Hare Scrambles

Hare scrambles are a family of races in which riders typically start at the same time on a designated course. Competitors attempt to complete the highest number of laps within a set time period.

### 2.3.3 Types of Desired OHM User Experiences

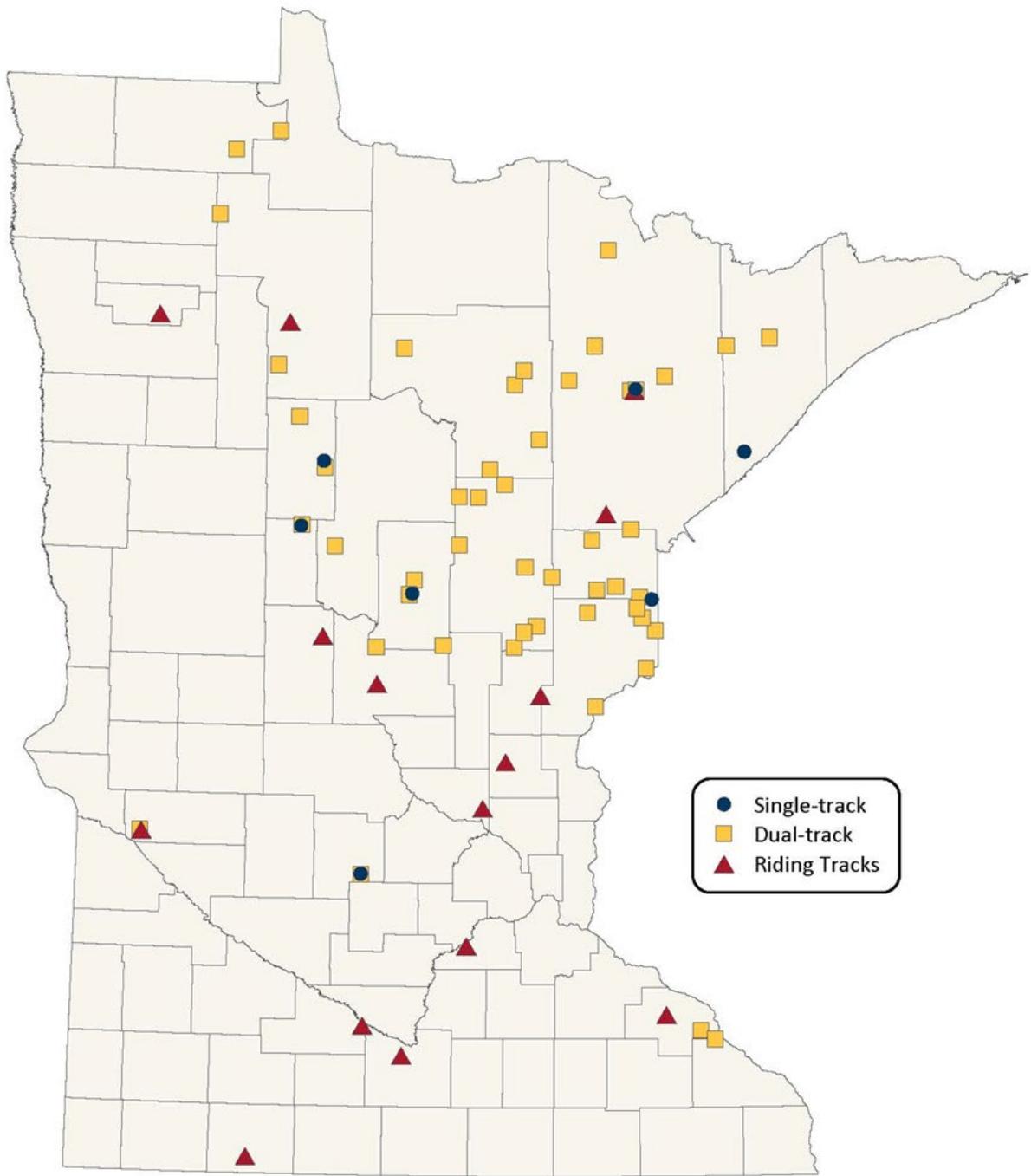
As with many recreational activities, OHM riders represent a wide range of experience levels and interests. Some riders seek technically challenging terrain with obstacles, while others prefer less demanding routes, and some pursue a variety of riding experiences depending on location, conditions or skill development. OHMs are designed for different terrain types and riding styles, and many riders further modify their motorcycles to better match specific conditions or intended uses.

## 2.4 Existing OHM Trail System Review

### 2.4.1 Riding Locations

Minnesota offers a variety of OHM riding opportunities. For the purposes of this plan, riding opportunities are classified as single-track, dual-track and riding tracks. Single-track and dual-track trails are commonly part of Minnesota's designated trail network, while riding tracks are most often located at privately owned, fee-based facilities. The majority of OHM trails and riding opportunities in Minnesota are located in the northeastern region of the state (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Existing OHM Riding Opportunities



*\*Non-public riding tracks are commonly fee-based*

The following tables provide a summary of single-track and dual-track trail mileage and describe the types of riding available at riding tracks in Minnesota.

Table 1: Single-track Riding Opportunities in Minnesota

Opportunity Name	OHM Miles
Alger Grade	13
Huntersville State Forest	55
Meeker County OHV Park	1
Miller Hills Trail	14
Nemadji State Forest/Straight Arrows Trail	47
Paul Bunyan State Forest/Martineau Trail System	82
Iron Range Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area	5

Table 2: Dual-track Riding Opportunities in Minnesota

Opportunity Name	ATV/OHM Miles
Alborn-Pengilly Railroad Trail	39
Alwood-Squaw Lake Trail	159
Appleton Area Recreational Park	12
Balsam Trail	5.5
Bemis Hill Trails	96
Bigfork and Balsam Connection	32
Blind Lake Connector and Loop	33
Chengwatana State Forest Trails	12
Chisholm Trail	16
East Range Multiple Use Trail	22
Fond Du Lac State Forest Trails	37
Fort Ripley Trail and Ripley Connection	9
Fourtown-Grygla and Con-Con Trail System	217
Gandy Dancer Trail	30
General C.C. Andrews State Forest Trails	24
Genoa Trail	3
Goodland Trails	19
Hill City Trail	16
Huntersville Trail	4
Iron Range Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area	15
Lawler Loops	16
Little Moose Trail	18
Matthew Lourey State Trail	42
Meeker County OHV Park	3
Miller-Blackbear Trail	19
Mississippi River Northwoods Trail	11
Moose River Connector	7
Nemadji State Forest	63
Pine Center Trails	12
Rabey Line Trail	19
Red Top Trail	22

Opportunity Name	ATV/OHM Miles
Round River Trail/Paul Bunyan State Forest	35
Saginaw Grade/Lumberjack Multiple Use Trail	10
Schoolcraft Trail	29
Snake Creek Trail	13
Solana Loop	15
Soo Line North Trail, Aitkin	48
Soo Line North Trail, Carlton	15
Soo Line South Trail, Aitkin	23
Soo Line South Trail, Carlton	29
Soo Pits Trail	5
Spider Lake Trails	26
St Croix State Forest Trails	26
Stony Spur II – Jackpot Trail	55
Taconite State Trail – Big Aspen Connection	18
Trout Valley Trail	9
UPM Blandin Trail	21
Warroad/Roseau Trails	85
Washington/Ramsey Trail	59
Wilton Trails Northwest	37

Table 3: Riding Track Opportunities in Minnesota

Opportunity Name	Type of Riding
Appleton Area Recreational Park*	Motocross
BCMx Adventure Park/Cambridge MX	Motocross, hare scrambles
Berm Benders Raceway	Motocross
Brooks International Raceway	Motocross
Diamond Park	Motocross
Echo Valley Motocross Track	Motocross
Elk River Extreme Motor Park	Hare scrambles, trails
Flying Dutchmen	Flat track, hill climb
Iron Range OHV Recreation Area*	Motocross
Jordan MX/Motokazie	Motocross, flat track
Kato Cycle Club	Motocross, flat track, hill climb, trails
Meadow Valley MX	Motocross, trails
Moto City, Little Falls	Motocross, hare scrambles
Moto City, Staples	Motocross, hare scrambles
Seven Clans MX Track	Motocross
Spring Creek MX/Millville	Motocross, hill climb, hare scrambles
Trax North MX Track	Motocross

\*Public riding track; all other listed riding tracks are private and fee-based.

## 2.4.2 Trail Difficulty

Similar to ski areas and ski trails, OHM trails are designated by difficulty level: easiest (green circle), more difficult (blue square) and most difficult (black diamond). Black diamond trails typically require more time to navigate, extending rider seat time and influencing trail preference. Table 4 summarizes common trail difficulty classifications and describes the characteristics associated with each level. This information is also available on the Minnesota DNR website: [Skill level and trail difficulty | Minnesota DNR \(state.mn.us\)](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/ohm/ohm/ohm.html).

Trail type and difficulty are closely related. Dual-track (shared-use) trails generally offer less technically challenging riding opportunities, while more difficult riding experiences are more commonly associated with single-track trails.

Table 4: Trail Difficulty Classifications

	<p><b><i>Green circle (easiest)</i></b>          Most highly developed class of trails (almost road like) with no steep hills and few obstacles.          Intended for novice riders who have mastered the basic skills necessary for safe operation on well-developed trails.          Also, for those lacking the experience or desire to ride more difficult trails.          Approximately 10 percent of trails in the system should be classified as "easiest."</p>
	<p><b><i>Blue square (more difficult)</i></b>          Suitable for the majority of intermediate riders.          More difficult trails are narrower with steeper hills and switchbacks and some moderate obstacles.          Intended for OHV enthusiasts with well-developed skills seeking a reasonably challenging trail ride.          Riders subjected to higher degrees of risk and exposure.          Approximately 80 percent of trails in the system should be classified as "more difficult."</p>
	<p><b><i>Black diamond (most difficult)</i></b>          Most primitive class of trails requiring a high-level of skill and experience.          Very steep grades, narrow trails, sharp alignments, rough or loose tread surfaces, and substantial obstacles.          Suitable only for proficient or expert riders to test their machines—and their own skills and abilities.          Approximately 10 percent of trails in the system should be classified as "most difficult."</p>

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## 3 Public and Local Government Engagement

### 3.1 Engagement Strategies

Public engagement was critical in formulating this strategic master plan. Approaches that were used to gather information for this plan from the general public and local government agencies included the creation of a public engagement questionnaire, a local government unit questionnaire and scheduling separate conference calls with local government units (LGUs).

Questionnaires were created to gather public and local government insight for the strategic master plan. A press release announcing the methods for public input gathering was published via a DNR news release and reached various channels of communication including, but not limited to, statewide news organizations, posting on the DNR website, and email notices using the GovDelivery system. Information was also published on several partner social media sites and promoted throughout stakeholder communities. Additionally, comments could be sent to the DNR OHV Planner via email or traditional mail in lieu of completing the public questionnaire.

A series of six conference calls were scheduled with county governments between October 26 and November 5, 2020. These calls were designed to gather information from the counties regarding the existing OHM trail system in Minnesota as well as to provide information to government staff regarding the strategic master plan. The goal of these calls was to prepare the counties with enough information to answer questions or direct comments about the OHM strategic master planning process.

### 3.2 Geographic Scope

The geographic scope of the OHM strategic master plan is statewide and encompasses all lands in Minnesota that are not within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, Tribal lands or open water. In later stages of trail planning and development, additional factors that preclude new OHM trail development will be considered (i.e., state parks, wetlands, sensitive habitats, etc.).

### 3.3 Public Input and Local Government Insight

Information regarding the planning process was provided to the public through DNR news releases. An initial news release was published in August 2020 informing the public that the DNR and its partners were beginning an OHM planning process. This news release informed the public of the purpose of the plan as well as next steps for scoping and information gathering. A second news release was published in November 2020 announcing public engagement efforts. This news release provided links to the online public questionnaire. A webpage was also established on the DNR website containing planning information, including links to general information about OHVs, options for the public to sign up for strategic master plan updates, and contact information for DNR OHV program staff. Another webpage was created in collaboration with the project consultant, UP! Outside, to provide general project information, including responses to frequently asked questions, county conference call scheduling information, and links to the public engagement questionnaire.

### 3.3.1 Respondent Profiles

In the public questionnaire, 64 percent of the respondents indicated they currently ride an OHM. Among the 36 percent who reported they do not ride OHMs at present, 30 percent acknowledged having ridden in the past (see Figure 6). Of respondents identifying as currently riding an OHM, 58 percent reported membership in an organization, with about 18 percent of those individuals indicating affiliation with multiple organizations (Figure 7). The data showed that 58 percent of organization members identified their primary organization as a motorcycle group. Prominent associations reported included the Amateur Riders Motorcycle Association and the American Motorcyclist Association. Additionally, equestrian organizations and ATV groups were notably represented among respondents, underscoring the diverse community interested in OHM use.

Figure 6: Current OHM Riding Status of Respondents

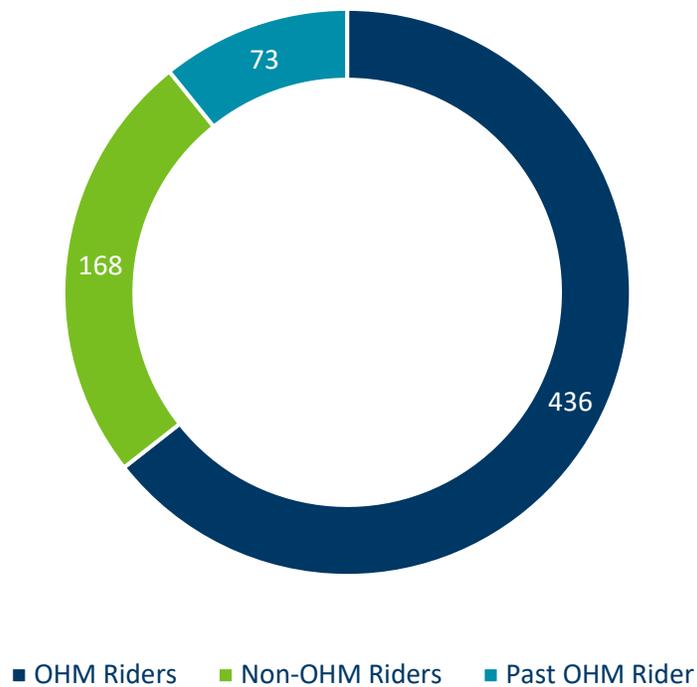
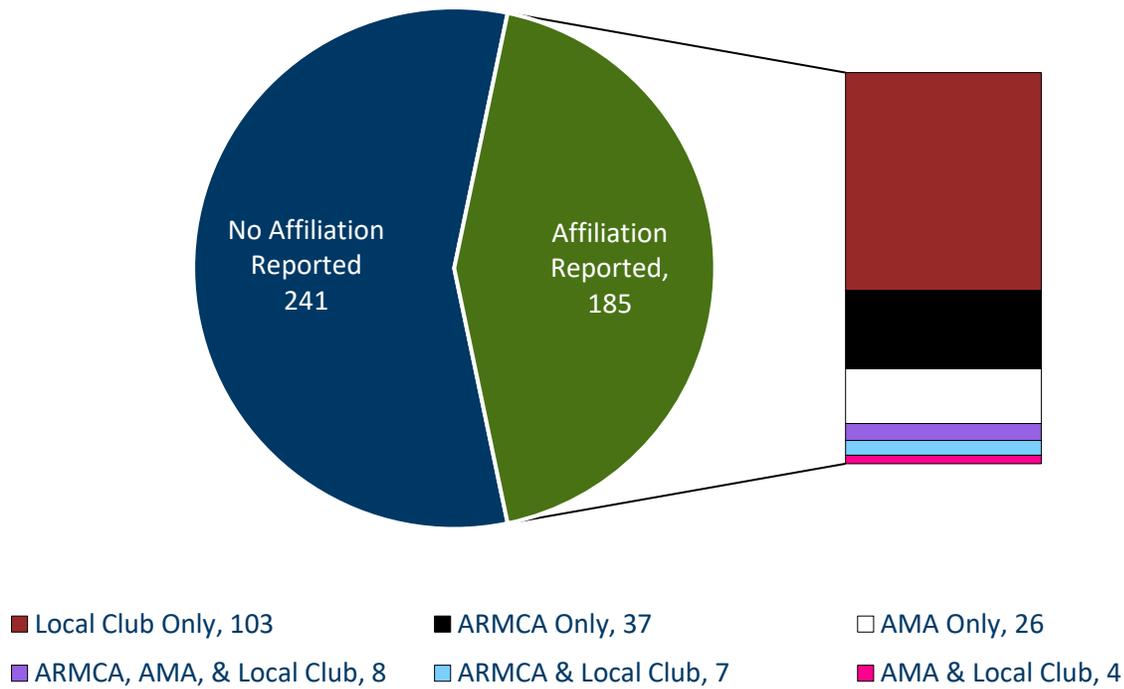


Figure 7: Current and Past OHM User Club Affiliations



Regarding OHM knowledge, 13 percent of respondents voluntarily provided insights regarding their knowledge of OHMs. Of this group, 48 percent reported experiences of user group conflicts between different types of motorized users sharing the trail as well as between motorized and non-motorized users. 45 percent of the individuals providing insight regarding their OHM knowledge expressed familiarity with OHM regulations, highlighting key areas such as the OHM definition, permissions regarding OHM use on county roads, and understanding the forest designation system. However, 22 percent of these respondents identified gaps in their knowledge regarding various aspects of OHM use, including definitions, regulations in Minnesota, and the integration of OHMs with other motorized trail users.

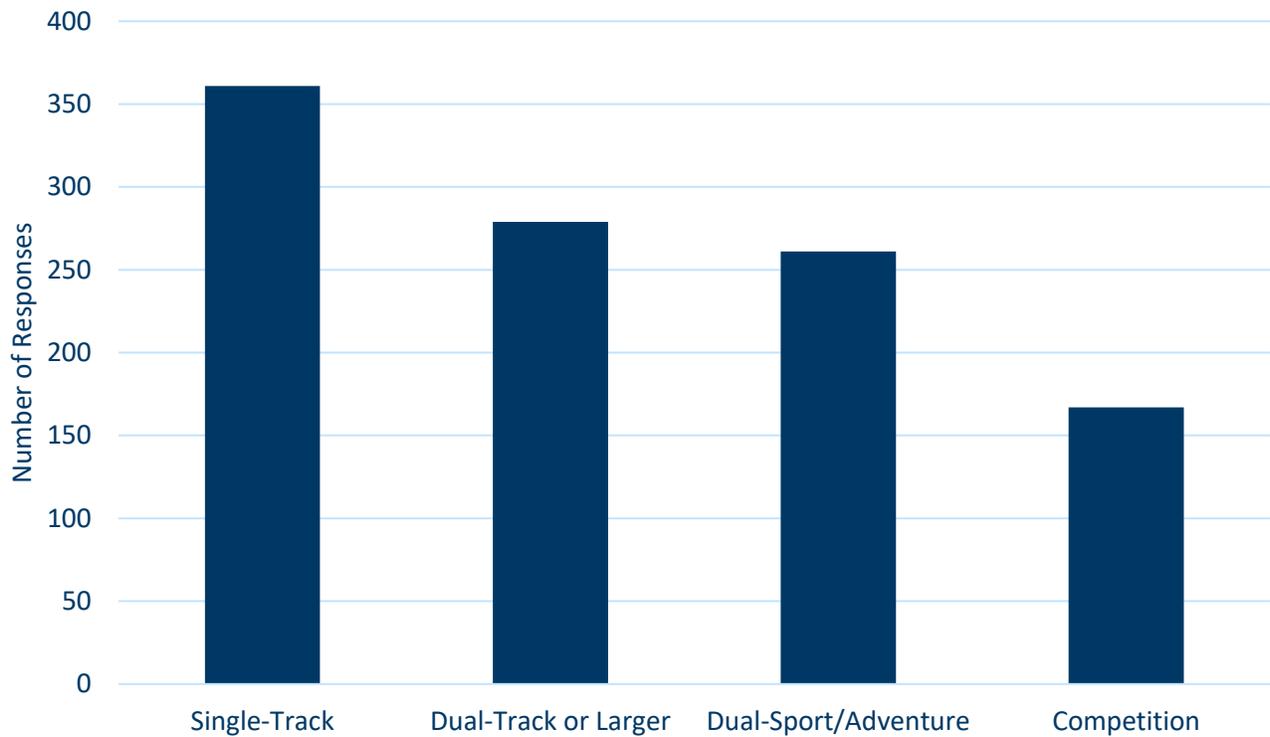
### 3.3.2 OHM Recreation Experience

The public questionnaire also provided insight into current and past OHM rider habits and preferences. 96 percent of the respondents provided detailed information regarding their preferred riding opportunities. Among current and past OHM users, 77 percent reported riding on single-track trails, while 59 percent indicated participation on dual-track or larger trails, suggesting potential overlap in trail use preferences. Additionally, 56 percent of current and past OHM users also identified as participants in dual-sport or adventure bike riding (see Figure 8).

Competitive riding emerged as a notable activity, with 36 percent of current and past OHM riders participating in competitive events typically held on private property. Additionally, 65 percent of current and past OHM riders that participate in competitive events reported involvement in trials bike events. Further qualitative feedback from respondents highlighted various riding experiences, including mentions of riding on private property, street riding, as well as riding on gravel, minimum maintenance and forest roads — often referred to as “pleasure

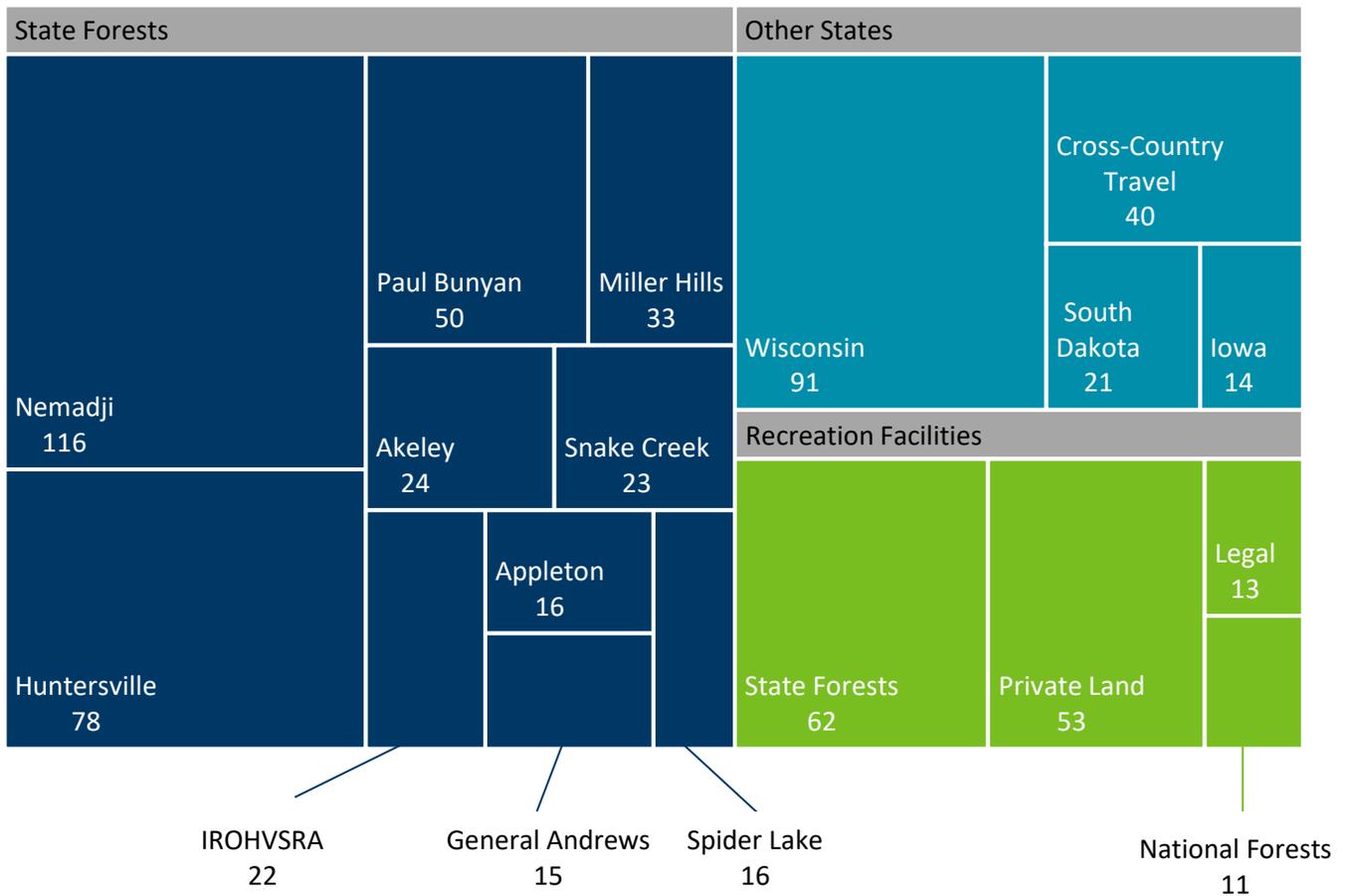
riding.” Some respondents also noted engagement with other forms of motorized activity, including ATV and ORV use.

Figure 8: Preferred OHM Riding Opportunities



When asked about their most frequented riding locations, 92 percent of current and past OHM users who responded to the questionnaire provided responses that included both general and specific locations within Minnesota (see Figure 9). Generalized mentions included locations like state forests, greater Minnesota, private property and national forests. Specific locations highlighted included Nemadji State Forest, Huntersville State Forest and Paul Bunyan State Forest. 29 percent of current and past OHM riders indicated that they recreate outside of Minnesota, citing locations like Wisconsin and South Dakota.

Figure 9: Most Frequented OHM Riding Locations Self-Reported by Riders



Comments from respondents highlighted perceived challenges in OHM riding, including insufficient OHM trails in Minnesota when compared to ATV trail opportunities and a lack of trails within accessible traveling distances. Concerns about trail legality, designation and safety were expressed by some respondents, emphasizing the importance of responsible riding practices.

Regarding factors contributing to trail enjoyment (Figure 10), 74 percent of current and past OHM riders provided insight. 36 percent of these responses identified the importance of variable terrain, describing preferences for trails with diverse elevations, open spaces, wooded areas and rocky hills. These responses often correlated with user preference for scenic views. Proximity to home was important to 20 percent of current and past OHM riders while public land access garnered mention in 12 percent of these responses. Furthermore, extensive or long-distance trails were valued by 11 percent of current and past OHM riders. Other important considerations included respondent desires for increased quantity and improved maintenance of single-track trails.

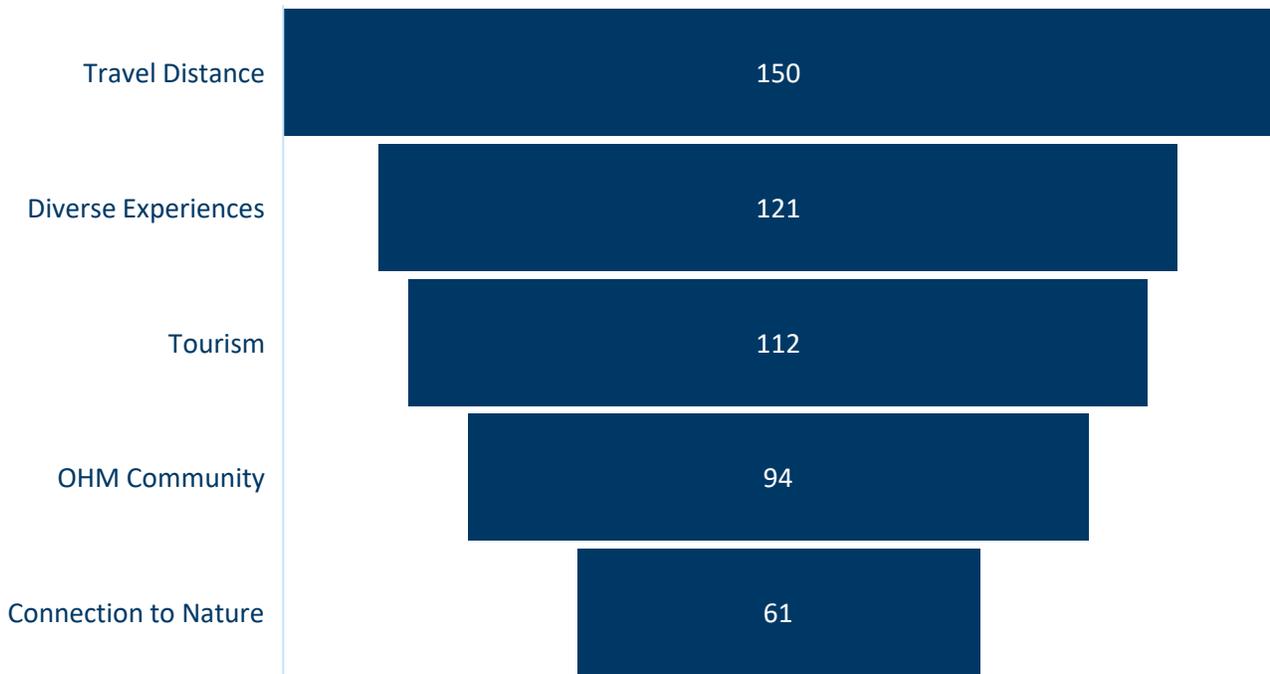
Figure 10: Factors Contributing to OHM User Trail Enjoyment



### 3.3.3 Desired OHM Opportunities

Through the public input questionnaire, 73 percent of questionnaire respondents revealed a strong desire for the establishment of additional OHM riding opportunities in Minnesota (Figure 11). Among these, 89 percent of individuals provided specific reasons for wanting new trails. 33 percent of these respondents indicated a preference for trails closer to their residences to minimize long-distance travel for recreation. 27 percent of such responses also expressed a need for more diverse OHM trails, indicating desires for experiences that are not inherently included or are a small portion of the current OHM trail system, such as single-track trails, longer distance trails, loops, skill building areas and beginner riding areas. Economic considerations were prevalent, with 25 percent of reporting individuals citing potential tourism and local economic benefits stemming from newly established trails. Many respondents underscored their preference for spending within the local economy as opposed to traveling outside Minnesota for OHM riding.

Figure 11: Desired OHM Opportunities



Other reasons motivating the desire for expanded OHM opportunities included fostering camaraderie and community within the sport, promoting family involvement, creating dedicated trails to reduce user conflicts, accommodating the growing number of OHM users in Minnesota, providing responsible and legal riding opportunities, connecting with nature, and alleviating traffic on existing trails for enhanced safety.

409 responses also identified areas where they would like to see new trails developed, demonstrating a clear interest in diverse landscapes and local riding opportunities closer to home. Notably, 25 percent of these responses pointed to southern Minnesota as an area particularly lacking in OHM opportunities, followed by central Minnesota, northern Minnesota and the Twin Cities Metro Area. Various potential sites for new trails were suggested, including areas such as gravel pits and abandoned mines as well as state forests, trails currently designated for ATV use, county- or city-owned land, and existing snowmobile trails on public land.

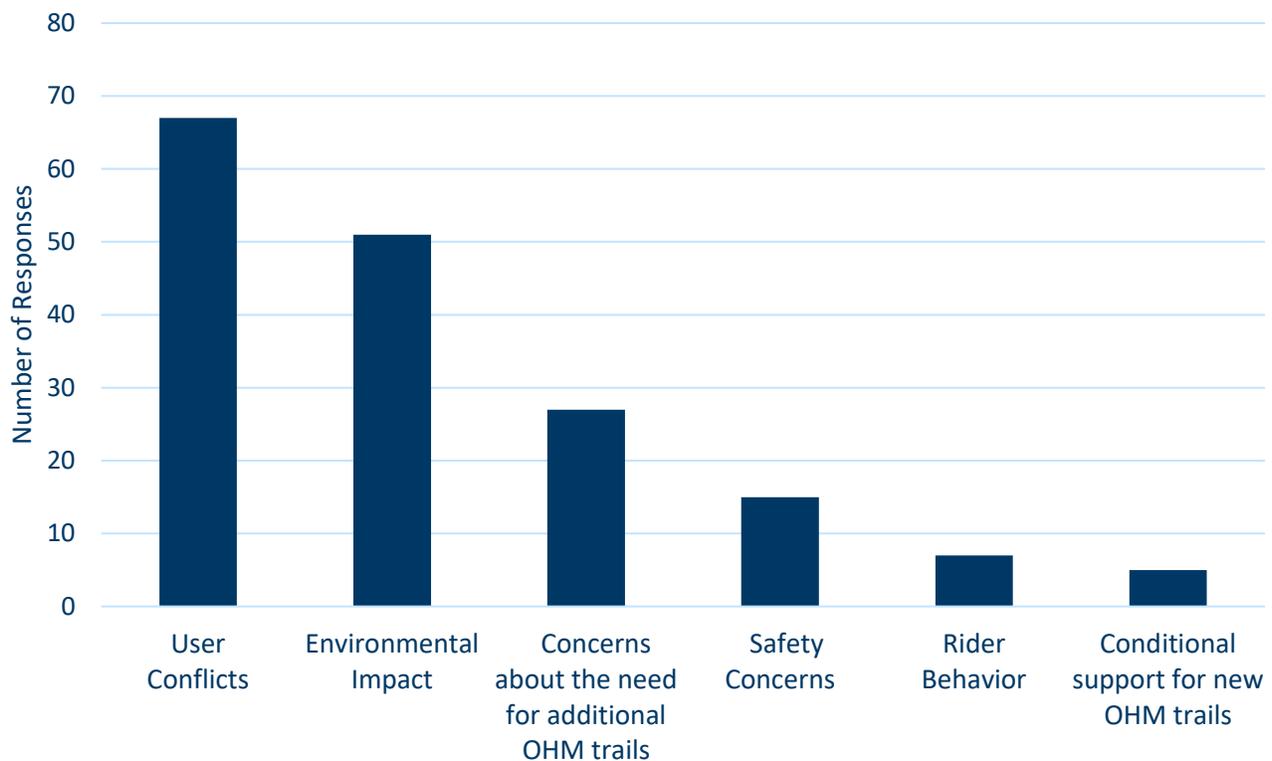
At the end of the survey, the questionnaire offered respondents an opportunity to provide additional write-in comments — 324 individuals provided further insights through this process. Among these responses, 53 respondents reiterated the desire for more OHM trails, while 40 comments contained suggestions related to management and planning processes. Other key suggestions included encouraging collaboration between different motorized user groups, expediting the trail proposal and development timeline, and allowing for flexible trail alignments to enhance sustainability. A portion of respondents supported the re-designation of existing motorized trails (e.g., ATV and snowmobile trails) for OHM use, while 23 comments reflected general positivity and support for OHMs, emphasizing community, family involvement and enjoyment of the activity.

### 3.3.4 Other OHM Stakeholder Responses

The public questionnaire also gathered key insights from people who are not supportive of additional OHM trails (20 percent of respondents). The questionnaire collected 117 responses on reasons for opposition to increased OHM opportunities (Figure 12). The predominant concerns were user conflicts — particularly disturbances to

non-motorized activities and equestrian use — and environmental impacts including emissions, noise pollution and trail degradation. Additionally, 23 percent of people who are not supportive of additional OHM trails believed that the current number of OHM trails in Minnesota was sufficient. Other concerns included poor rider behavior and safety issues. Some responses indicated conditional support for new OHM trails if they are exclusively designated for OHM use (single-track trails) and do not encroach upon trails for non-motorized activities.

Figure 12: Non-OHM Rider Considerations



The write-in comment option at the end of the questionnaire led to 324 respondents providing additional feedback, with 71 comments focusing on user conflict and disruption to non-motorized activities. Management suggestions were offered by 36 respondents, while 14 comments addressed improvements in the planning process, including the need for better maintenance of existing trails and avoidance of poorly designed new trails. Environmental concerns were raised by 33 respondents, and there were calls for changes in OHM regulations (9 comments) and enforcement (13 comments). Additional feedback covered topics such as rider education, dealership regulation, OHM program funding, registration fees, special event permits and land suitability for new OHM opportunities.

### 3.3.5 Local Government Insight

The local government questionnaire received responses from a variety of local government officials and staff, including land commissioners, public works staff, city council members and local government forestry personnel. Nearly all responses indicated a familiarity with OHMs and OHM trails, and several responses indicated that the respondents themselves were OHM riders. Half of respondents indicated their LGUs have GIA OHM trails in their

area or are developing opportunities through the GIA Program. The remaining half identified a lack of OHM riding opportunities in their area.

Where OHM riding opportunities do exist, most respondents indicated that these trails are on public lands not owned by the state, such as city or county-owned land. A few respondents did identify local trails on state land, as well as private riding areas and OHM tracks at local fairgrounds.

All respondents from LGUs with OHM riding opportunities in their area reported an interest in development of more OHM opportunities. Most indicated an interest in more trails, while half indicated interest in training facilities, motocross tracks and dual sport trails. Most of these respondents indicated they would be open to allowing competitive OHM events to take place.

Around half of respondents identified a lack of local OHM riding opportunities. All of these respondents reported that they had never been approached by a club to sponsor an OHM trail via the GIA Program. Most of these respondents said they would be interested in working with a club to develop OHM trails and enroll them in the GIA system.

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## 4 Project Development Information and Guidance

### 4.1 Project Development Process and Flowcharts

When the DNR oversees a new OHM trail project, the process project development takes usually comes in two forms: GIA development projects and state-designated trail development projects. Each process has a clear set of steps so all interested stakeholders involved in project management and development can track projects from their inception through to implementation. These steps are demonstrated in Figure 13 for GIA trails and Figure 14 for state trails. These steps provide clarity and transparency, allowing interested parties to openly communicate about project development, process improvements and overall collaborative efforts. The steps are also available on the DNR's [OHV website](#).

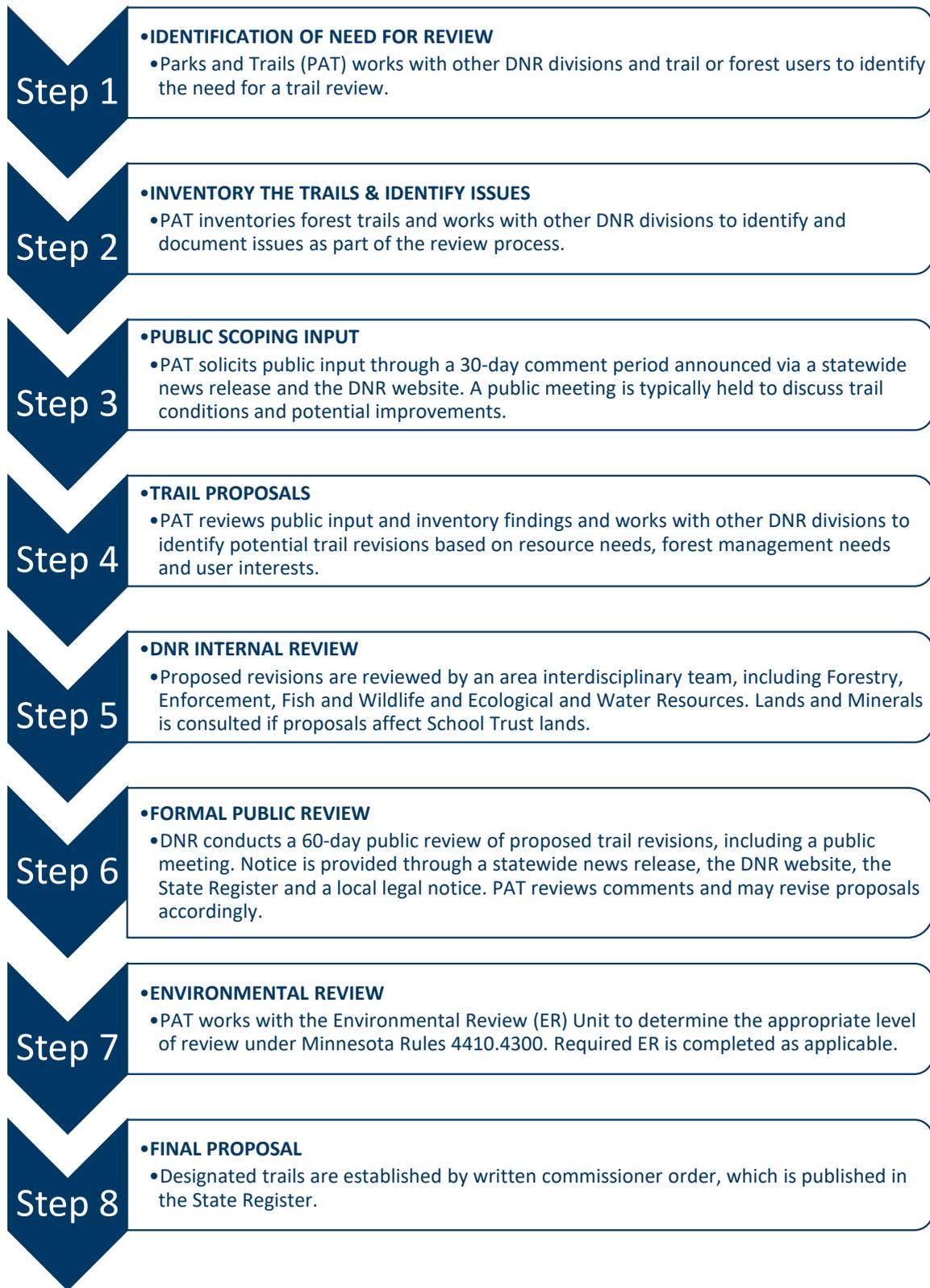
The DNR intends to use all project guidance in the steps demonstrated in the flowcharts. Such an approach produces a consistent system of names and step numbers to refer to for the various stages of project development and assists in project communication and messaging, making it easier for all stakeholders to track projects through various stages of development. The processes in the flowcharts are similarly used in other areas of OHV project development (ATV, ORV, etc.) managed by the DNR.

The DNR has developed a seven-step process to review and implement new trail applications for the GIA program which is shown in Figure 13 below. The DNR also reviews state forest trails for sustainability, connectedness and user experience. State Forest Trail Planning evaluates forest trails and determines if new trails should be considered for connectivity. Parks and Trails staff lead these evaluations and conduct both internal and external reviews. This process is outlined below in Figure 14. The DNR Commissioner designates or undesignates state forest trails through a commissioner's order.

Figure 13: Grant-in-Aid 7-Step Process



Figure 14: State-Designated Trails Project Process



## 4.2 Suggested Sustainable Trail Design Guidance and Reference Materials

Building sustainable OHM routes and trails is a best practice that applies to all OHM development and is a requirement for both state-designated and GIA trail projects. Sustainable trail development focuses on providing well-designed and well-managed OHM opportunities that limit impacts to natural and cultural resources.

The following trail design guides and reference materials represent the best available guidelines for developing OHM trails that are physically, ecologically and economically sustainable. Collectively, these guidelines provide a comprehensive reference for agencies, trail advocates, policymakers and other stakeholders as they consider various types of trail development projects. The limitation of the guidelines is that each trail is unique and requires site-specific evaluation to determine the most appropriate design approach. In some cases, refinements or adjustments to the guidelines will be warranted to ensure that the health, safety and welfare of the public is not compromised. While these guidelines are an important reference, they are not a substitute for in-the-field analysis required to make informed decisions about the design and development of a specific OHM trail.

### **Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Parks and Trails Division (DNR)**

Released in 2007, this 300-page publication provides a comprehensive "how-to" guidebook for developing all types of recreational trails that has become a trail design "go-to" throughout Minnesota and the entire United States. The guidelines and best practices are intended to aid Minnesota land managers in applying new, innovative and environmentally sustainable approaches to trail planning, design and construction. The document can be downloaded on the [DNR website](#).

### **Trail Construction & Maintenance Notebook by the United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (USFS)**

First published in 1996 and updated in 2007, the USFS's Trail Construction & Maintenance Notebook is a quick, pocket-sized encapsulation of sustainable trail design guidance. Focusing on Forest Service policies and direction, it is a practical guide for trail work that is small and readable. The document can be downloaded on the [USFS section of the U.S. Department of Agriculture website](#).

### **Designing Sustainable Off-Highway Vehicle Trails, by the United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (USFS)**

Released in 2013, this guide provides a collection of tools for the construction and management of OHV trails generally, and OHM trails in specific. The guide brings together resources from a variety of sources, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Forest Service), the U.S. Department of the Interior (National Park Service), private trail management organizations, the State of Alaska, and others. The author developed some of the tools based primarily on his experience managing OHV trails in Alaska. The document can be downloaded from the [American Trails website](#).

## **Great Trails: Providing Quality OHV Trails and Experiences, by the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC)**

The theme of Great Trails is “balancing the needs of the recreationists with protection of resources.” It helps land managers understand that trail planning, design, construction, maintenance and management are not five separate processes but rather one continuous process referred to in the book as “The Great Trail Continuum.” The guide stresses the importance of providing trails for riders that are fun and challenging. The document can be downloaded from the [NOHVCC website](#).

## **Minnesota Grant-In-Aid Program Manual, by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)**

The GIA Program Manual includes many helpful guidelines for trail design, construction and maintenance. It summarizes key trail design information from two other trail development guides: Minnesota Trail Planning, Design and Development Guidelines, and Great Trails: Providing Quality OHV Trails and Experiences. The GIA Program Manual identifies planning constraints such as steep slopes and agricultural lands that affect trail design and other design features that may affect speed, trail sustainability and erosion. It also includes invasive species management expectations and references the [DNR invasive species guidance](#). The manual can be downloaded from the [DNR website](#).

### **4.2.1 Guiding Principles for Sustainable Trails**

The Guiding Principles discussed below are reflected in each of the suggested trail design guides and reference materials (listed above). Application of these principles will minimize the impact of trails on natural resources and sensitive ecological systems. Importantly, the application of these guiding principles can be balanced against the need to locate trails where they will be of high recreational value to the targeted users, who often want to be close to nature, enjoy beautiful scenes and observe wildlife. This is an important consideration and underscores the need for resource managers and trail designers to work together to determine which values are most important for any given situation.

- ❖ Guiding Principle #1: Avoid sensitive ecological areas and critical habitats.
- ❖ Guiding Principle #2: Develop trails in areas already influenced by human activity.
- ❖ Guiding Principle #3: Provide buffers to avoid/protect sensitive ecological and hydrologic systems.
- ❖ Guiding Principle #4: Use natural infiltration and best practices for stormwater management.
- ❖ Guiding Principle #5: Provide ongoing stewardship of the trails and adjoining natural systems.
- ❖ Guiding Principle #6: Ensure that trails remain sustainable.
- ❖ Guiding Principle #7: Formally decommission and restore unsustainable trail corridors.

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## 5 Future Strategies

This strategic master plan establishes a guide for maintenance and development of the OHM trail system in Minnesota. Ultimately, the plan can serve as a lens through which decisions are made regarding OHM recreation. Many of the strategies presented in the following sections are already incorporated in day-to-day OHV program management but are also presented here to add transparency to the process for all involved in OHM recreation in Minnesota. The information herein is intended to guide OHM trail maintenance and development by communicating opportunities, but it does not include any trail alignments, designs or specific areas for trail development. The next step in moving forward any future OHM opportunities would be to identify discrete projects, areas and trail alignments that would respond to identified needs and opportunities. For more information on how future opportunities become projects and move through the initiation, review and approval stages, see the project development process in Chapter 4.

### 5.1 Trail Maintenance

For any trail system to be sustainable, adequate maintenance should be a priority. It is important to understand current maintenance needs and to respond to them in a timely manner. Maintenance funding is limited, and before adding new trails it is critical to be sure there are sufficient resources to take good care of the trails already built. Clubs are pivotal in monitoring trails and evaluating them for maintenance needs and in communicating those needs with the DNR and other stakeholders.

The DNR works with user groups, clubs and riders on a regular basis to make sure maintenance issues are understood and addressed. Holding seasonal user group meetings helps in facilitating ongoing conversations regarding trail maintenance and should continue to be practiced. It is also important to communicate internally regarding trail maintenance needs. The OHV program should continue to work closely with regional specialists, area offices and divisional staff to ensure maintenance needs are understood and addressed.

The DNR (together with the LGU and club for trails in the GIA program) monitors trails to address any maintenance concerns. For designated trails, the DNR will explore developing a schedule prior to the start of the riding season to monitor the trail throughout the season. For GIA trails, the DNR should work with the LGU and club to identify maintenance priorities and a monitoring schedule.

The DNR has a roving maintenance crew that can assist with larger OHV trail projects. The roving crew consists of experienced trail builders with specialized equipment to perform maintenance projects. DNR area supervisors can request the roving crew for specific projects. For GIA trails, most maintenance is performed by OHM clubs, with 90 percent of costs reimbursed through the GIA Program. A club may request DNR assistance, including the roving crew, for major projects or storm clean-up.

#### 5.1.1 Trail Maintenance Strategies:

- ❖ Communicate maintenance needs by meeting regularly with DNR staff, user groups and LGUs.
- ❖ Develop a trail monitoring schedule at the beginning of a riding season.

- ❖ Develop best management practices that support sustainable trail conditions (e.g., water mitigation measures), reduce erosion and protect natural resources (e.g., invasive species prevention and management).
- ❖ Prioritize grants intended for maintenance of OHM trails.
- ❖ Continue to review trail maps, kiosks and signage for consistency and support clubs, sponsors and DNR staff in providing adequate navigation resources to users.
- ❖ Continue to monitor trails in state forests and update signage as needed to reflect changes in conditions, such as those resulting from logging or other forest management activities.

## 5.2 Connectivity

Improved connectivity between riding areas can enhance overall user experience, improve the efficiency of the statewide trail system (i.e., reduce the potential for redundancies by connecting areas with different offerings in terms of ability level or type of experience) and reduce user density in individual riding areas by creating defined connection paths that can help reduce instances of user created trails.

Enhancing connectivity throughout the statewide OHM trail system is beneficial as an overarching goal for new OHM development and re-route projects. New connectivity corridors can be pursued between riding areas and challenge parks (such as the Iron Range Off-highway Vehicle State Recreation Area) within each region. Options to enhance existing and previously disturbed corridors that already cross the landscape — such as former rail corridors, transmission rights-of-way or highway rights-of-way — can also be explored, where feasible.

### 5.2.1 Connectivity Strategies:

- ❖ Place greater emphasis on maintaining and improving existing trails than on creating new trail systems.
- ❖ Prioritize the development of connections between riding areas and other points of interest to enhance local recreational access and economic development opportunities.
- ❖ Solicit input on desired connections and connection priorities from OHM clubs, trail users (those who ride OHMs and those who do not), local communities and other stakeholders.

## 5.3 Grant-in-Aid Process Modernization

As noted previously in this plan, GIA trails require a partnership between the DNR and an LGU such as a county, city or township. Typically, the LGU will partner with a club to assist with trail construction and maintenance. Proposals are often initiated by a club, which then finds an LGU to act as the project sponsor. The LGU, in partnership with the club, submits an application to the DNR for the proposed GIA trail. Detailed information regarding GIA and the GIA application can be found on the MN DNR OHV webpage and in Chapter 4 of this plan. Although the official partnership is between the DNR and the LGU, the communications between the DNR and the club as well as the LGU and the club are just as crucial to a successful GIA trail. Throughout the proposal review process the DNR, LGU and local club each have important roles in submitting, reviewing and processing a GIA trail application. Until recently, each party mailed hand-written, hard copy forms to the others to move the process along and it was difficult at times for the LGUs, local clubs and other interested parties to know the status of any given application.

In 2021, the DNR started an improvement process to review the GIA program, increase efficiency and ensure the program was working well for stakeholders and members of the public. The process included engagement with OHV organizations (i.e., ATV Association of Minnesota, Minnesota 4-Wheel Drive Association and ARMCA) and club members to identify what could be improved. Outcomes of this process include updated reimbursement amounts that better reflect existing construction and maintenance costs as well as the addition of an application for winter trail grooming, plowing and maintenance costs. This improvement process could be further expanded to include a project notification system intended to notify people who opt-in to receive OHV-related updates. Such an improvement process can also lead to enhanced alignment of project review with strategic master plan goals.

### **5.3.1 GIA Modernization Strategies:**

- ❖ Explore the use of an online project proposal platform that allows all parties to track project status, view review progress and identify the next step in the review process.
- ❖ Continue to monitor the GIA proposal process — information gleaned from proposals can help guide future management actions.
- ❖ Encourage clubs and LGUs to work closely with DNR staff in early stages of the GIA proposal process to ensure the proposal is complete.
- ❖ Evaluate the possibility of requiring GIA proposals to include multiple trail alignment alternatives or a larger corridor within which a preferred alignment could be identified after review of site-specific conditions and considerations.

## **5.4 Coordination and Collaboration**

The overarching goal of the OHV program’s stakeholder and partner engagement and coordination is to support participatory and collaborative planning in the program’s projects and activities. Coordination and collaboration involves external stakeholders and partners and internal cross-disciplinary review. The goal is to provide clear information available to all partners on how the engagement process is going to be carried out. It is important to emphasize the importance of listening to the pros and cons of any idea or viewpoint as such an active listening process often leads to a greater understanding of multiple interests. To further strengthen collaboration and shared understanding across the outdoor recreation community, the program encourages inclusive engagement that fosters communication between all trail users, including both motorized and non-motorized interests.

To ensure DNR's three-part mission is achieved, collaboration across DNR divisions and subject matter experts should continue to be prioritized throughout the OHM trail maintenance and development process. As a part of this process, the DNR OHV program identifies specific staff/positions within each division to be involved in various points of a given project, this process is referred to as an ‘interdisciplinary review’.

### **5.4.1 Coordination and Collaboration Strategies:**

- ❖ Provide clear access to information for ongoing/new projects and activities.
- ❖ Continue to prioritize interdisciplinary review across DNR divisions early in the GIA proposal review process and for DNR-led projects.

- ❖ Provide mechanisms for clubs, LGUs and others interested in OHM recreation to share their contact information with the DNR to be notified of press releases and announcements concerning various OHM-related projects and activities.
- ❖ Encourage cross-interest dialogue and collaborative problem-solving by supporting opportunities for motorized and non-motorized trail users to share input, participate in public meetings or engage in planning processes that affect shared-use landscapes.
- ❖ Support DNR staff relationships with clubs by encouraging attendance at annual meet ups, maintenance workshops, virtual monthly meetings, etc.
- ❖ Increase volunteer maintenance capacity by encouraging volunteer attendance at annual trail maintenance workshops and communicate training needs and requirements (e.g., chainsaw certification, best practices for managing [invasive species](#)) to potential volunteers.
- ❖ Explore opportunities to continue collaborating with agency partners on long-term OHV monitoring efforts to support adaptive management and knowledge sharing.

## 5.5 Policy and Regulation

Policy and regulations, along with education, are the primary mechanisms any land management agency uses to manage recreational activities. Accordingly, the DNR has developed a system to deliver clear and consistent communication of policies and regulations across the agency and stakeholders. Using an adaptive management approach to land and resource management, the DNR can continually review and modify OHM policy and regulations over time to ensure recreation activities are properly managed on public land and on public land adjacent to private land.

### 5.5.1 Policy and Regulations Strategies:

- ❖ Prioritize funding or dedicated staff time for OHM rules and regulations communications. Proactive communication concerning common questions such as seasonal closures, trail conditions and roadway travel can help educate riders, establish the DNR as an authoritative source of information, and increase regulation compliance.
- ❖ Establish a presence on popular Minnesota OHM forums to provide information and updates to the OHM community and answer questions related to OHM rules and regulations. Posts and answers could point riders toward resources on the DNR website to encourage riders to check official sources for information.
- ❖ Continue the Trail Ambassador reporting system where ambassadors report and catalogue maintenance and enforcement issues. This system helps the DNR identify where maintenance funds and enforcement staff can be used more effectively and provides a clearer understanding of on-the-ground conditions to inform coordination with LGUs and Tribal partners.

## 5.6 Understanding and Responding to Use

Understanding use patterns and addressing evolving trends in recreational use is critical to effectively managing OHMs. Tracking OHM registrations, developing a trail use assessment program that utilizes trail traffic counters, and conducting post-ride or intercept surveys with riders will be important strategies in understanding trends and adapting management strategies over time. Observable key trends that influence riding activity include a

strong interest in more single-track riding opportunities, preference for OHM trails closer to riders' residences, a desire for more loop trails with both beginner and technical riding areas, and interest in riding in areas with amenities (campgrounds, gas stations, diverse trails, etc.). These trends require management strategies that consider associated maintenance costs and infrastructure development costs.

### **5.6.1 Strategies for Responding to Use Trends:**

- ❖ Partner with OHM clubs to share available trail use information such as data from trail traffic monitoring.
- ❖ Explore the development of trails that provide experiences such as technical trails, trails with proximate camping experiences and loop rides.
- ❖ Regularly assess riders' needs, particularly pertaining to riding locations, maps and navigation.
- ❖ Explore opportunities to provide maps and information, toilet facilities and campsites (private or non-state park) near popular OHM routes.
- ❖ Create a clear process for requesting, evaluating and conducting allowable motorized events on state managed lands.

## **5.7 OHM Communication**

The DNR pursues opportunities to improve communications with OHM riders through all its messaging, particularly regarding maps and other navigation information. An integrated and consistent graphic style for the OHM program across websites, trailhead and on-trail signage, project plans/documents, regulation books, and other materials could improve overall communications. More information about the GIA program could also be shared with Minnesota residents to raise awareness about the program generally.

### **5.7.1 OHM Communications Strategies:**

- ❖ Pursue opportunities to improve communications with OHM riders through messaging, particularly maps and other navigation information.
- ❖ Ensure all promotional material showcases best practices in OHM etiquette and safety.
- ❖ Encourage participation in social media and in-person events to engage with existing OHM users.
- ❖ Prioritize the placement of OHM signage in multi-use trail areas to encourage respectful and safe riding.
- ❖ Share information about project development, recreational benefits, the recreational use statute and landowner liability, and other relevant OHM topics with public land users, riders, OHM clubs, local government representatives, and other stakeholders and partners.
- ❖ Conduct an ongoing assessment of users' informational needs, particularly pertaining to maps and navigation.
- ❖ Create a trail advisory group with representatives from a variety of motorized and nonmotorized trail users, including OHM riders, to provide input to the DNR as public lands are managed for multiple uses and to improve communication among user groups.

## 5.8 OHM Education and Stewardship

Education is a critical element of enhancing stewardship at the local, state and even national level. There are opportunities for improving education and information-sharing with the OHM community in Minnesota through further collaboration with the Enforcement division and by engaging other partners in the DNR. There are also opportunities to encourage stewardship and empower greater conservation of natural resources through better information sharing.

Accurate and effective information dissemination is an important factor of building a maintainable OHM trail system. The DNR can provide interpretive materials and OHM literature aimed at effectively communicating OHV types (OHMs, ATVs, ORVs, etc.), classifications, and regulations targeted for both riders and non-riders.

### 5.8.1 OHM Education and Stewardship Strategies:

- ❖ Continue to work with ARMCA to support trail building and trail maintenance workshops. These workshops, which emphasize stewardship, could be coordinated with existing ARMCA events.
- ❖ Collaborate with other DNR divisions and natural resource specialists to share wildlife, habitat and other natural resource information geared toward sustainable trail practices.
- ❖ Identify recurring opportunities for rider education, safety, and respectful and responsible riding courses for the public.
- ❖ Promote awareness of sustainable trail practices and of trail design guidelines.

## 5.9 Summary

It is important to continue to emphasize that maintenance and the ongoing review of the current OHM trail system in Minnesota is important to the system's sustainability. It should also be reiterated that ecological impact is at the forefront of sustainability considerations and is paramount to the DNR. Overall user enjoyment of OHM trails in the state can also guide key decisions regarding OHM trail development. Planning can help ensure a sustainable and enjoyable recreation system for all Minnesotans to explore while simultaneously promoting responsible OHM trail management and best riding practices through education, outreach and stewardship.

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# Appendix A: OHM Stakeholders and Partners Invited to Participate

## Counties

- Association of Minnesota Counties
- League of Minnesota Cities
- Minnesota Association of Townships
- Minnesota Association of County Land Commissioners
- Minnesota County Engineers Association
- Land Managers
- Aitkin County Land and Parks Department
- Anoka County Parks
- Becker County Natural Resources Management
- Becker County Parks & Recreation
- Beltrami County Natural Resource Management
- Benton County Department of Development
- Big Stone County Environmental Services
- Blue Earth County Property and Environmental Resources
- Brown County Administration
- Carlton County Land Department
- Carver County Public Works
- Cass County Land Department
- Chippewa County Land & Resource Management
- Chisago County Environmental Services/Zoning and Parks
- Clay County Environmental Health
- Clearwater County Land and Forestry
- Cook County Land Services
- Cottonwood County Environmental Office
- Crow Wing County Land Services
- Dakota County Parks
- Dodge County Parks and Trails
- Douglas County Parks and Trails
- Faribault County Public Works
- Fillmore County Administration
- Freeborn County Public Works
- Goodhue County Land Management
- Grant County Land Management
- Hennepin County Transportation
- Houston County Zoning-Planning Office
- Hubbard County Natural Resources
- Isanti County Parks and Recreation
- Itasca County Land Department
- Jackson County Public Works
- Kanabec County Economic Development Authority
- Kandiyohi County Environmental Services
- Kittson County Administrator
- Koochiching County Land and Forestry
- Lac qui Parle Environmental Office
- Lake County Forestry
- Lake of the Woods County Land & Water Planning
- Le Sueur County Parks
- Lincoln County Environmental Office
- Lyon County Environmental Department
- Mahnommen County Administrator
- Marshall County Environmental Services
- Martin County Coordinator
- McLeod County Environmental Services
- Meeker County Planning and Zoning
- Mille Lacs County Environmental Resources
- Morrison County Land Management
- Mower County Public Works
- Murray County Parks and Fairgrounds Department
- Nicollet County Public Works
- Nobles County Public Works
- Norman County Environmental Services
- Olmstead County Administration
- Otter Tail County Land and Resource Management
- Pennington County
- Pine County Land Department

- Pipestone County Environmental Services
- Polk County Parks and Recreation
- Pope County Land and Resource Management
- Ramsay County Community and Economical Development
- Red Lake County
- Redwood County Environmental Office
- Renville County Environmental Services
- Rice County Parks and Facilities
- Rock County Administration
- Roseau County Coordinator
- Scott County Planning and Zoning
- Sherburne County Planning and Zoning
- Sibley County Administrator
- St. Louis County Land and Minerals
- Stearns Environmental Services
- Steele County Administration
- Stevens County Environmental Services
- Swift County Parks, Drainage and Wetlands
- Todd County Administration
- Traverse County Land Management Office
- Wabasha County Administration
- Wadena County Parks
- Waseca County Parks
- Washington County Public Works
- Watonwan County Land Management
- Wilkin County Environmental Office
- Winona County Administration
- Wright County Planning and Zoning
- Yellow Medicine Land and Resource Management

#### **Highway Departments**

- Aitkin County Highway Department
- Anoka County Highway Department
- Becker County Highway Department
- Beltrami County Highway Department
- Benton County Public Works / Highway
- Big Stone County Highway Department
- Blue Earth County Public Works
- Brown County Highway Department

- Carlton Transportation Department
- Carver County Public Works
- Cass County Highway Department
- Chippewa County Highway Department
- Chisago County Public Works - Highway Department
- Clay County Highway Department
- Clearwater County Highway Department
- Cook County Highway Department
- Cottonwood Public Works
- Crow Wing County Highway Department
- Dakota County Transportation
- Dodge County Highway Department
- Douglas County Public Works
- Faribault County Public Works
- Fillmore County Highway Department
- Freeborn County Public Works
- Goodhue County Public Works
- Grant County Highway Department
- Hennepin County Transportation
- Houston County Highway Department
- Hubbard Highway Department
- Isanti County Highway Department
- Itasca County Transportation Department
- Jackson County Public Works
- Kanabec County Public Works
- Kandiyohi County Public Works
- Kittson County Highway Department
- Koochiching County Highway Department
- Lac qui Parle Highway Department
- Lake County Highway Department
- Lake of the Woods County Public Works
- Le Sueur County Highway Department
- Lincoln County Highway Department
- Lyon County Highway Department
- Mahnommen County Highway Department
- Marshall County Highway Department
- Martin County Highway Department
- McLeod County Highway Department
- Meeker County Highway Department
- Mille Lacs County Public Works
- Morrison County Public Works

- Mower County Public Works
- Murray County Highway Department
- Nicollet County Public Works
- Nobles County Public Works
- Norman County Highway Department
- Olmstead County Public Works
- Otter Tail County Highway Department
- Pennington County Highway Department
- Pine County Public Works
- Pipestone County Highway Department
- Polk County Public Works
- Pope County Highway Department
- Ramsay
- Red Lake County Highway Department
- Redwood County Highway Department
- Renville County Public Works
- Rice County Highway Department
- Rock County Highway Department
- Roseau Highway Department
- Scott County Planning and Zoning
- Sherburne County Public Works
- Sibley County Public Works
- St. Louis County Public Works
- Stearns County Highway Department
- Steele County Highway Department

- Stevens County Highway Department
- Swift County Highway Department
- Todd County Public Works Services
- Traverse County Highway Department
- Wabasha County Highway Department
- Wadena County Highway Department
- Waseca County Highway
- Washington County Public Works
- Watonwan County Public Works
- Wilkin County Highway Department
- Winona County Highway Department
- Wright County Highway Department
- Yellow Medicine County Highway Department

#### **Development Organizations**

- Dodge County Economic Development Authority
- Houston County Economic Development
- Lake County Chamber of Commerce
- Meeker County Development Corp
- Northwest Regional Development Commission
- Thief River Falls Chamber of Commerce
- Todd County Development Corporation
- Warroad Chamber of Commerce

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# Appendix B: Public Engagement Questionnaire

## Questionnaire Summary

The Public Engagement Questionnaire received 690 responses of which 470 (68 percent) were complete and 220 (32 percent) were partial or incomplete. The questionnaire was open from November 23, 2020, to February 15, 2021, and was taken primarily by Minnesota residents, although it was answered by some non-residents who were interested in providing feedback on their experience with OHMs in Minnesota. This questionnaire was announced via a DNR news release on November 23, 2020, and was shared by OHM discussion groups on social media.

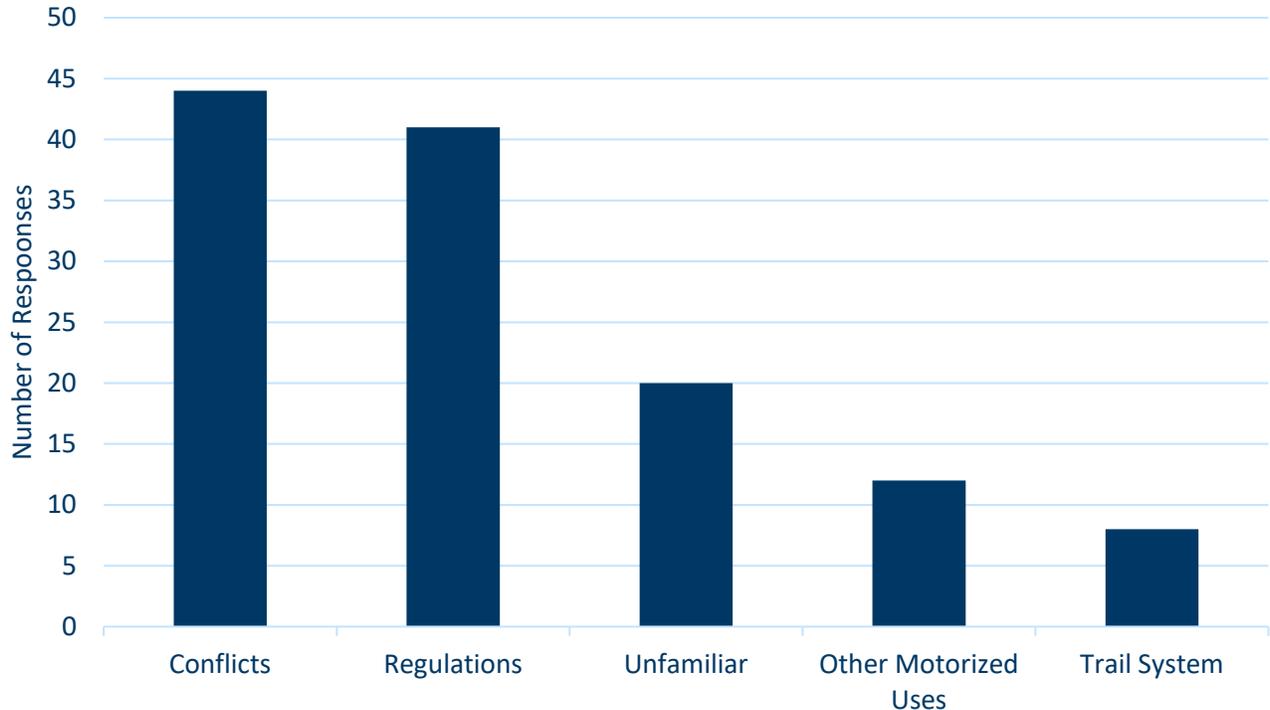
The Local Government Questionnaire received 10 responses, and all responses were complete. The questionnaire was open from November 23, 2020, to February 15, 2021, and was taken by county management professionals, including land commissioners, public works directors, foresters and recreation staff. The following sections summarize information received from the public engagement questionnaire.

## User Profiles

- OHM Participation: 64 percent of respondents (n = 436) said they currently ride an OHM.
  - 57 percent of those who currently ride an OHM reported being a member of an organization (n = 250).
  - 80 percent of OHM riders (n = 202) identified the organizations or clubs they belong to. 68 riders reported membership in ARMCA, 54 riders reported membership in the AMA, and 122 riders reported membership in a local motorcycle club. 35 of those individuals reported belonging to more than one organization and/or club.
  - Of the 36 percent of respondents who said they do not currently use an OHM (n = 241), 30 percent (n = 73) stated they have ridden an OHM in the past. 45 percent of past OHM riders (n = 33) reported current membership in an organization or club.
- OHM Knowledge: 13 percent of respondents (n = 91) chose to provide information about their level of knowledge about OHMs.
  - 48 percent of these responses (n = 44) indicated some sort of user conflict, including conflicts between non-motorized and motorized users as well as motorized users of different types sharing trails. Conflicts between equestrians and OHMs were frequently identified.
  - 45 percent of responses (n = 41) referenced their knowledge of OHM regulations. These included the definition of an OHM, OHMs being allowed on some county roads, familiarity with the forest designation system and how electric bicycles are not considered OHMs.
  - 22 percent of responses (n = 20) mentioned a lack of knowledge or familiarity with one or more aspects of OHM use, including definitions, how OHMs are regulated in Minnesota and how OHMs share trails with other motorized uses.
  - 13 percent of responses (n = 12) related their knowledge of OHMs to their knowledge of other forms of motorized recreation. Respondents shared things like knowledge of the snowmobile GIA system, their experience sharing multiuse trails with OHMs, how ATV registrations

outnumber OHM registrations in Minnesota, or how they've used OHVs at work and therefore have some familiarity.

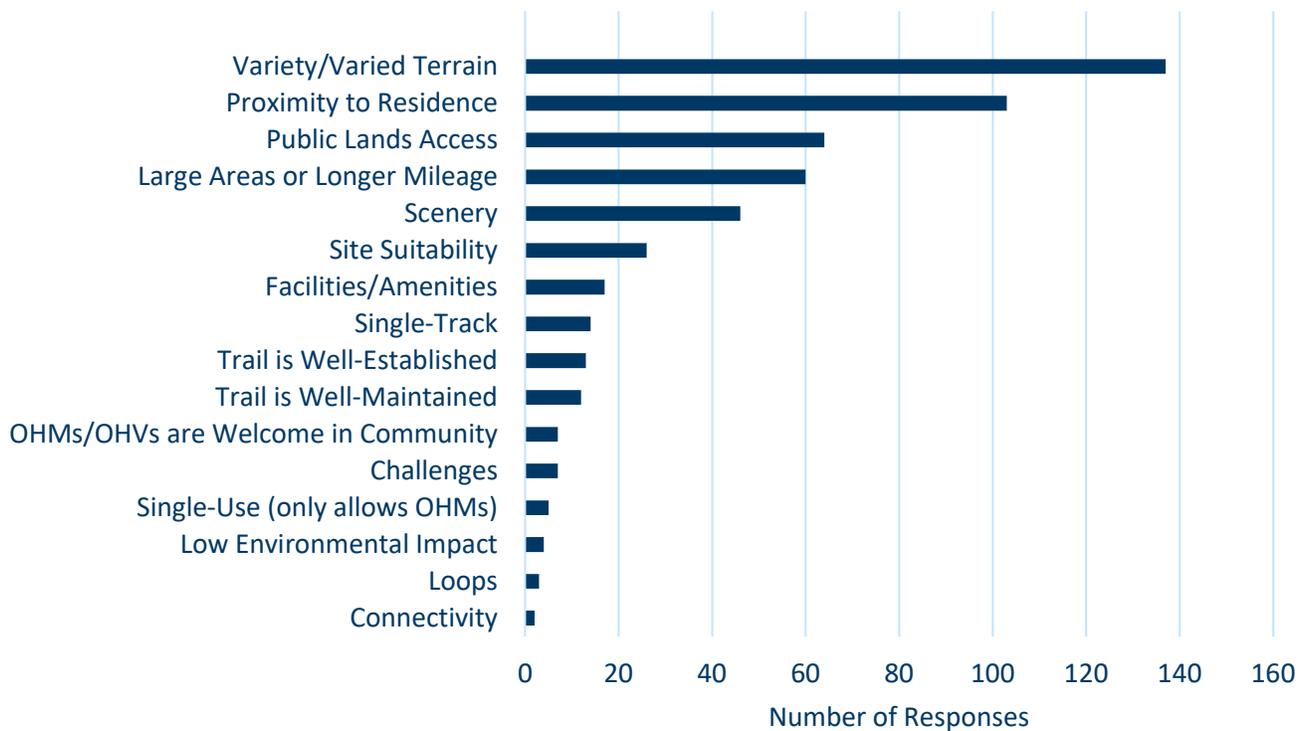
- 9 percent of responses (n = 8) indicated knowledge of the OHM trail system, including how specific trails are designated for OHM use and how some trails allow multiple uses, like ATVs and OHMs together.



## OHM Recreation Experience

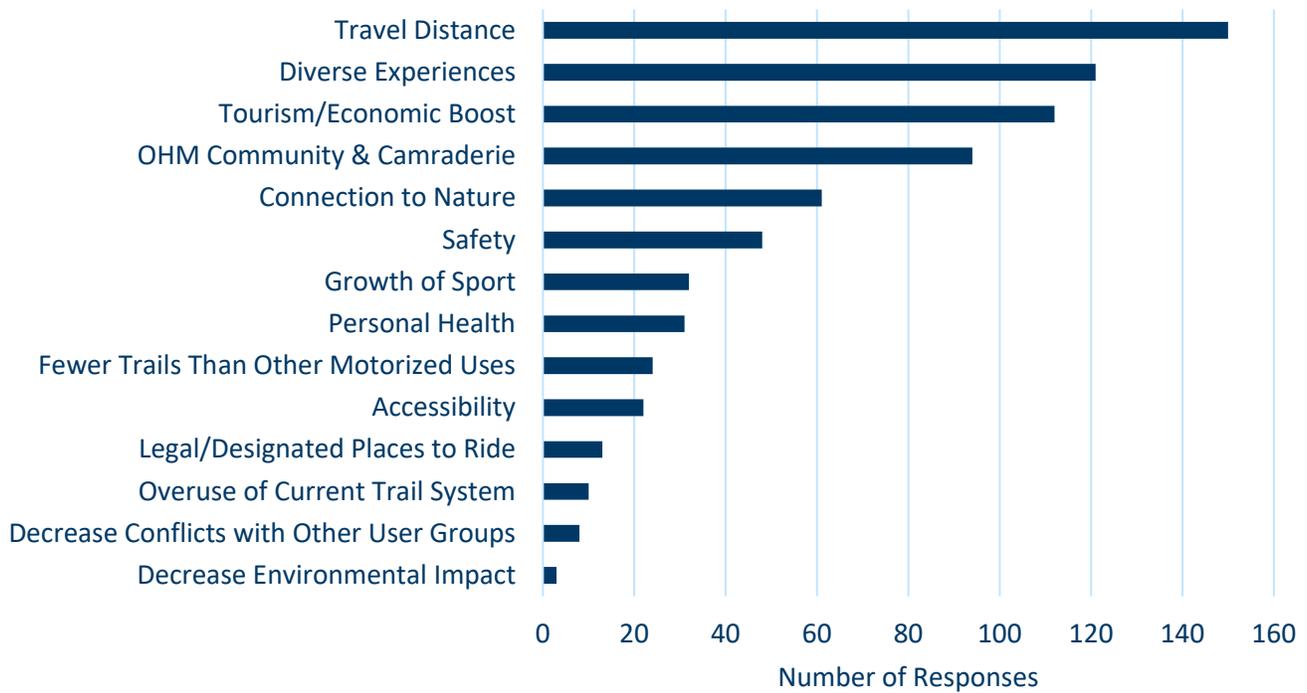
- 96 percent of current and past OHM users (n = 491 in total) provided responses when asked where they currently ride.
  - 77 percent of current OHM users stated they ride on single-track trails (n = 361) and 59 percent of users (n = 279) stated they ride on trails that are dual-track or larger. There may be overlap in these numbers as users can choose to participate in multiple types of riding.
  - 56 percent of OHM users (n = 261) stated they participate in dual-sport or adventure bike riding.
  - 36 percent of OHM users (n = 167) reported that they ride in competitive events, typically hosted on private property. 23 percent of OHM users also reported participating in trials bike events (n = 108).
  - 59 respondents provided additional comments to the question about the kinds of riding they do.
    - 14 comments referenced private property
    - 8 comments referenced street riding
    - 7 comments identified gravel roads, minimum maintenance roads and forest roads or “pleasure riding” as another type of OHM riding
    - 9 commenters referenced another motorized use, such as ATV riding or ORV use.

- 92 percent of current and past OHM users (n = 468 in total) provided responses about where they ride most often. Respondents cited both generalized locations (such as the state of Minnesota, MN state forests, etc.) and specific locations (Nemadji State Forest, Appleton OHV Park, etc.).
  - Other states:
    - Wisconsin was cited 91 times
    - South Dakota or the Black Hills was referenced 21 times
    - Iowa was referenced 14 times
    - Out-of-state travel or cross-country travel was cited 11 times
  - General recreation facilities:
    - State forests were cited 62 times
    - Private property was referenced 53 times
    - National forests were referenced 11 times
  - Specific locations:
    - Nemadji State Forest was identified in 116 responses
    - Huntersville was cited 78 times
    - Paul Bunyan was referenced 50 times
    - Miller Hills, Martineau, Akeley, Snake Creek and IROHVSRA were cited 20–35 times
  - Write-in comments:
    - Travel to other states, both Midwest and nationally, was identified in 40 responses
    - 12 comments specifically referenced a lack of OHM trails in Minnesota or a lack of trails within traveling distance from their residence
    - 13 comments specified that they ride wherever it is legal, designated and safe for OHMs to ride
- 74 percent of current and past OHM users (n = 377 in total) provided information about what makes trails enjoyable.
  - 36 percent of OHM users (n = 137) cited variable terrain and trails as being important. Many referenced changes in elevation, open areas, woods or forests, rocks and hills. This also includes trails of varying lengths and varying levels of difficulty. Scenery was also an important factor and was cited by 44 percent of users who identified varying terrain as valuable (n = 46).
  - 20 percent of OHM users (n = 103) indicated proximity to their location as being important to them.
  - 12 percent of users (n = 64) cited public lands access as being valuable to them, followed by large acreage or long-distance trails being cited by 11 percent (n = 60).
  - Site suitability, or the ability of the land to support OHM trails and maintain trails in a sustainable way, was cited 26 times as being valuable to users.
  - Other reasons cited included nearby facilities and amenities, single-track trails, well-established and well-maintained trails, communities welcoming of OHM use, challenging trails and features, single-use OHM trails (not shared with other uses), low environmental impact, trail loops and trail connectivity.

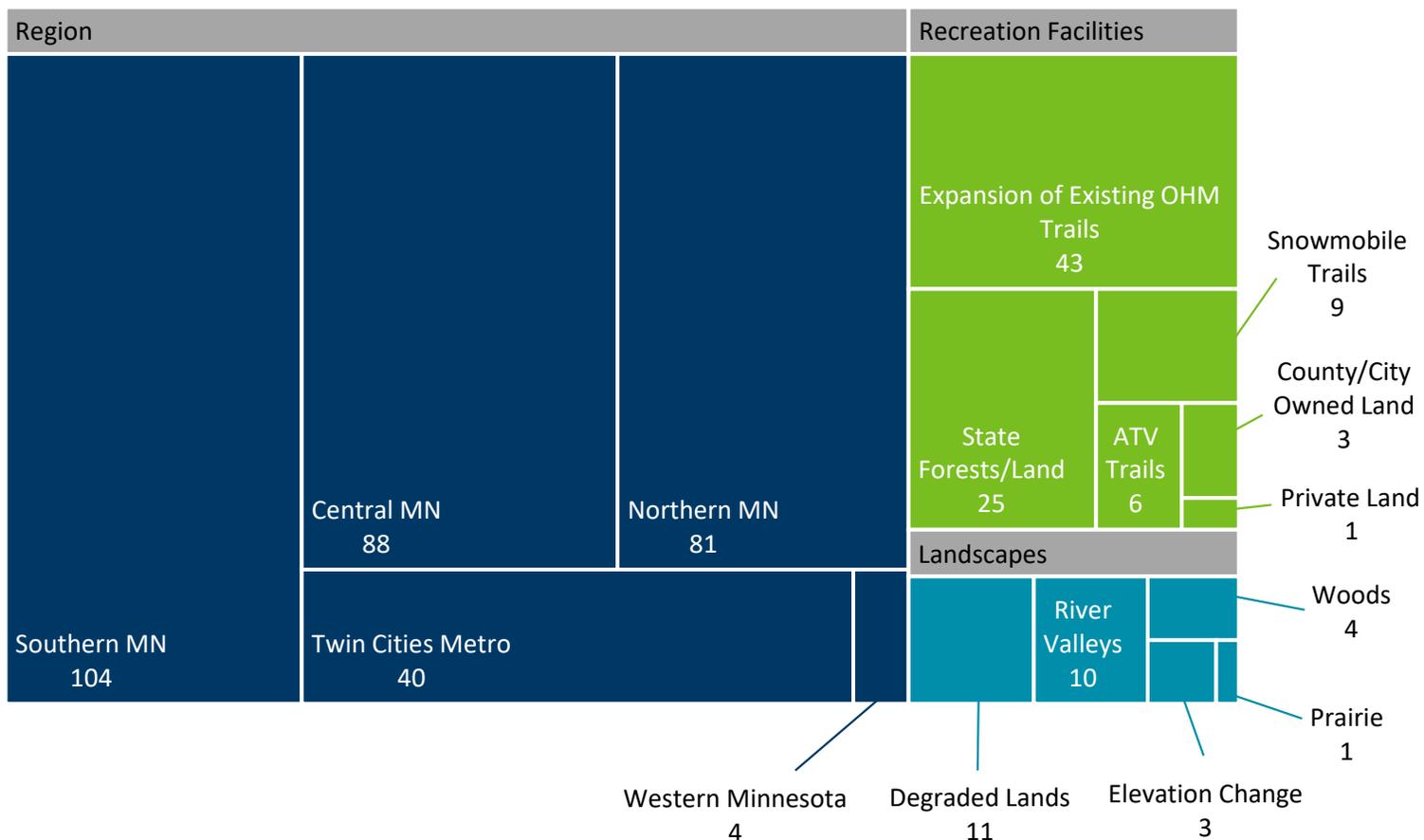


## Desired OHM Opportunities

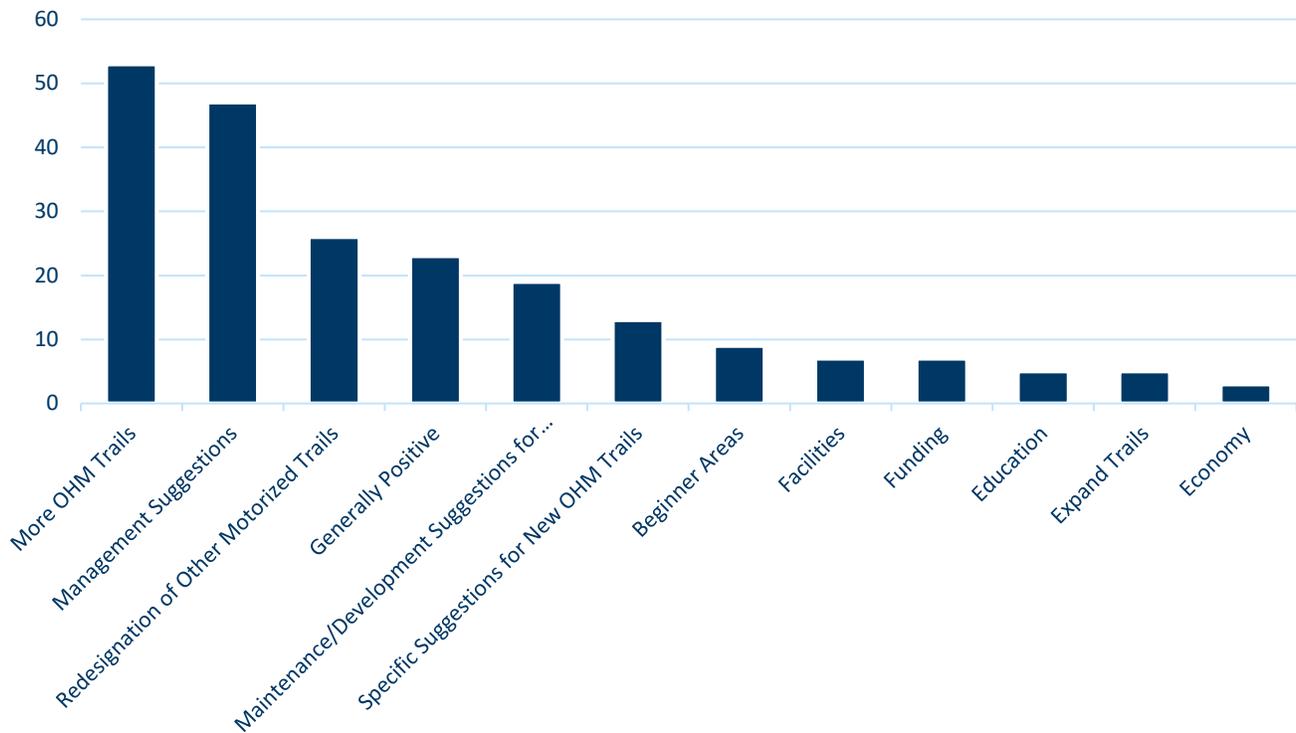
- 506 respondents (79 percent of question responses, 73 percent of total survey respondents) said they would like to see additional OHM riding opportunities established in their area.
- 448 respondents identified specific reasons why they would like to see new OHM trails added to the OHV trail system in Minnesota.
  - 33 percent (n = 150) responded that they would like riding opportunities to be closer to where they live so long-distance travel is not required to legally recreate.
  - 27 percent (n = 121) indicated a desire for more diverse OHM trails and experiences compared to the existing trail system.
  - 25 percent (n = 112) cited tourism or local economic activity as a benefit of new OHM trails. Riders generally preferred to spend their money locally versus traveling long distances or outside of Minnesota to ride their OHM.
  - 19 percent (n = 94) identified their appreciation for the community and camaraderie built by OHM riders and want to see the sport continue to grow. Family participation in the sport and fun were often included alongside references to the community.
  - Other reasons cited included connection with nature, increased safety, the growing popularity of OHM use, personal health, inequality compared to the number of other motorized trails, public lands access to provide legal and responsible riding opportunities, alleviating congestion on existing trails and creating dedicated trails to reduce user conflict.



- 409 respondents identified areas where they would like to see new trails be developed. Respondents' answers ranged from general landscape types to specific locations and broader regions of Minnesota.
  - 104 respondents (25 percent) identified Southern Minnesota as lacking OHM opportunities and expressed a strong desire for more trails in the region. Central Minnesota followed with 88 responses (22 percent), Northern Minnesota with 81 responses (20 percent) and the Twin Cities metro area with 40 responses (10 percent).
  - 66 respondents (16 percent) expressed a desire for more trails within state forests or lands already under state ownership.
  - Respondents also identified degraded areas such as gravel pits or abandoned mines, ATV trails, county or city owned land, expansion of trails already in the OHM trail system and snowmobile trails as opportunities for future development.

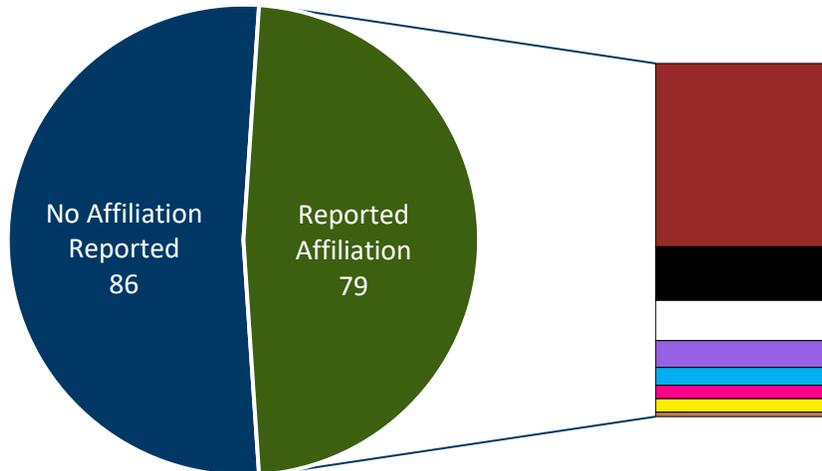


- 324 respondents chose to submit additional responses at the end of the questionnaire when asked for other comments or suggestions for this plan.
  - 53 responses indicated a desire for more OHM trails in the state.
  - 36 comments included management suggestions, and 4 comments addressed planning process improvements. Comments included increased collaboration with other motorized user groups, the amount of time required to propose and develop new OHM trails and flexibility to adjust trail alignments to allow trails to heal and remain sustainable.
  - 26 comments supported redesignation of other motorized trails, including ATV and snowmobile trails, to allow OHM use.
  - 23 comments were generally positive and supportive of OHMs, citing community and camaraderie, family participation, and fun and enjoyment of the sport.
  - 19 comments included suggestions for clubs and volunteers related to trail maintenance and development. 12 comments provided specific suggestions for new trails.
  - 14 comments discussed travel times to current OHM trails and expressed a desire for OHM trails closer to their residence.
  - Other comments included the need for beginner riding areas or areas for skill development and practice, how OHM activity can boost local economies, expanding and improving existing trail opportunities, desire for better facilities, funding suggestions, regulation improvements and specific types of trails they would like to see developed.



## Respondents Who Do Not/Have Not Used an OHM

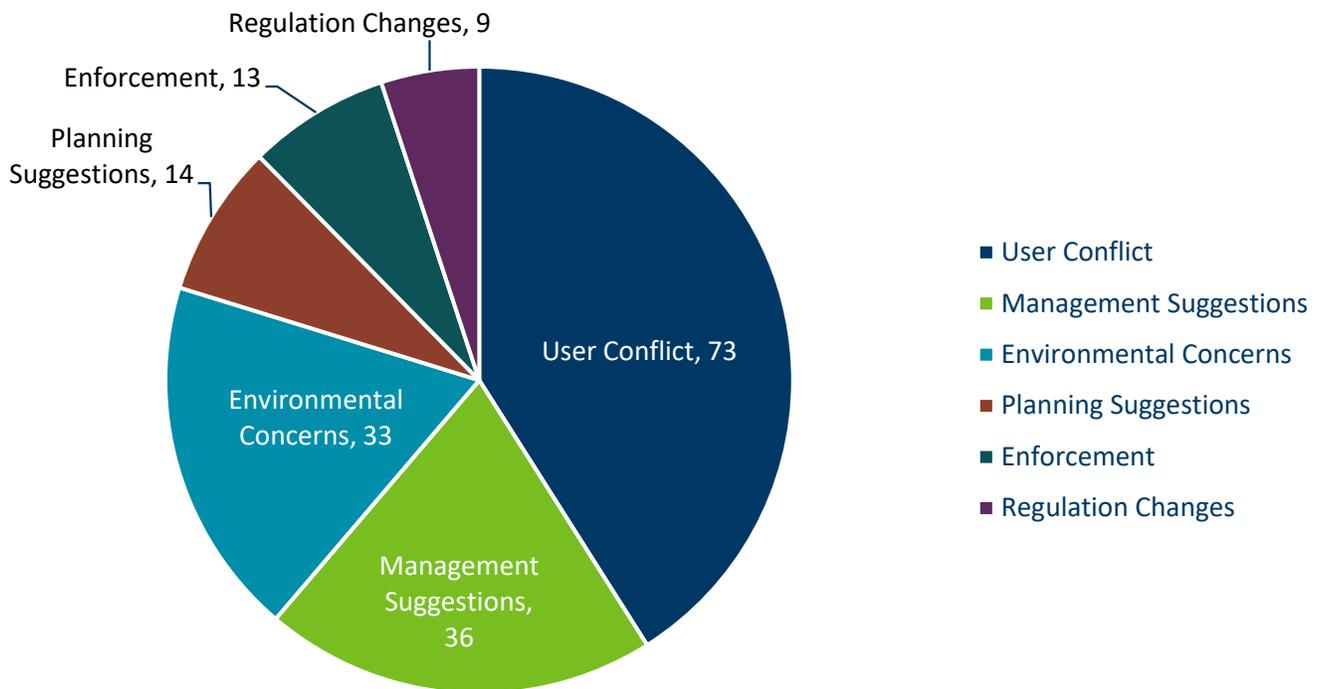
- 24 percent of survey respondents (n = 168) said they do not currently use an OHM and have not used one in the past. Of these respondents, 48 percent (n = 79) reported membership in an organization or club.
  - Of those who reported membership in an organization, 52 percent belong to equestrian groups (n = 41), 14 percent belong to motorized recreation clubs (n = 11), and 11 percent belong to other outdoor organizations (n = 9) such as Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever or the National Rifle Association.
- Reported affiliations also included small numbers of environmental groups, friends groups (nonprofit organizations that support state parks through volunteer services), hiking or trail running clubs, ski clubs and organizations centered around municipalities.



- Equestrian Club Membership, 41
- Motorized Rec Clubs, 12
- Other Outdoor Orgs, 9
- Local Municipalities, 6
- Hiking/Trail Running Clubs, 4
- Environmental Advocates, 3
- Friends Groups, 3
- Ski Clubs, 1

- 135 respondents (80 percent of non-OHM users, 19 percent of total survey respondents) said they would not like to see additional local OHM trail development.
  - 49 percent (n = 59) said trails should not be established in other, non-local areas, 41 percent (n = 49) said they were unsure and 10 percent (n = 12) said trails should be established in other, non-local areas.
- 117 respondents identified reasons why they would not like to see more OHM opportunities be established in their area.
  - 57 percent (n = 67) cited user conflicts such as disturbance of peace and quiet or interruption of non-motorized sports, and conflicts with equestrians frequently cited.
  - 44 percent (n = 51) cited concerns about the environmental impacts of OHM trails and activity, including emissions, noise pollution, erosion and rutting.
  - 23 percent (n = 27) said there are already enough OHM trails in Minnesota.
  - Other reasons cited were poor rider behavior and safety concerns. Five responses indicated conditional support for new OHM opportunities if conflicts with non-motorized users were minimized by creating dedicated OHM-only trails and if new OHM trails did not replace trails used by non-motorized groups such as hikers.
- ❖ 324 respondents chose to submit additional responses at the end of the questionnaire when asked for other comments or suggestions for this plan.
  - 71 responses elaborated upon user conflict and the disruption of non-motorized activities by OHV recreation.
  - 36 responses provided management suggestions, and 14 comments addressed planning process improvements. These comments included improved maintenance of the current OHM trail system before proposing new trails and concerns about existing OHM trails being poorly designed.

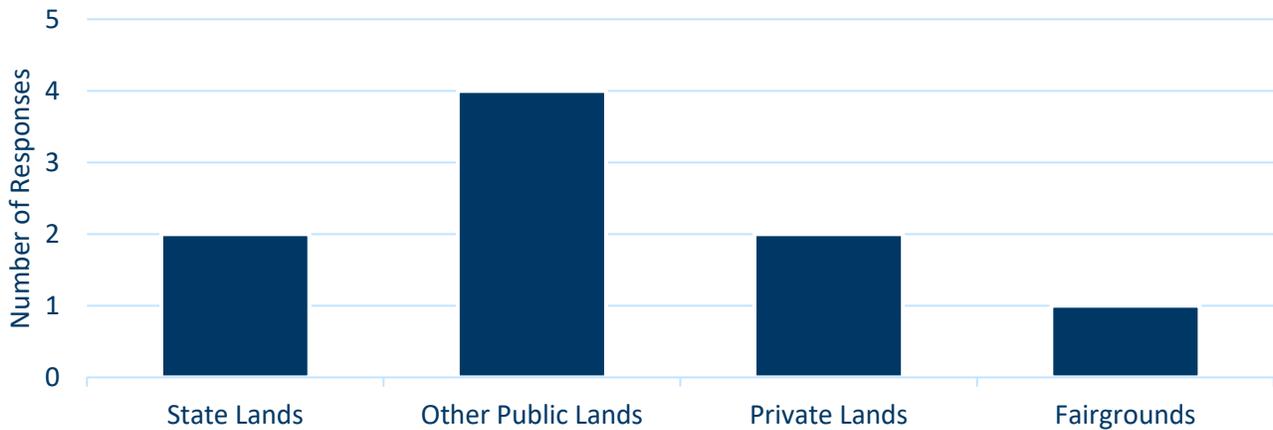
- 33 responses identified concerns with degradation of the environment and sustainability of OHM trails.
- Nine comments stated a desire for changes in OHM regulations, and 13 responses expressed concerns about enforcement of current OHM regulations.



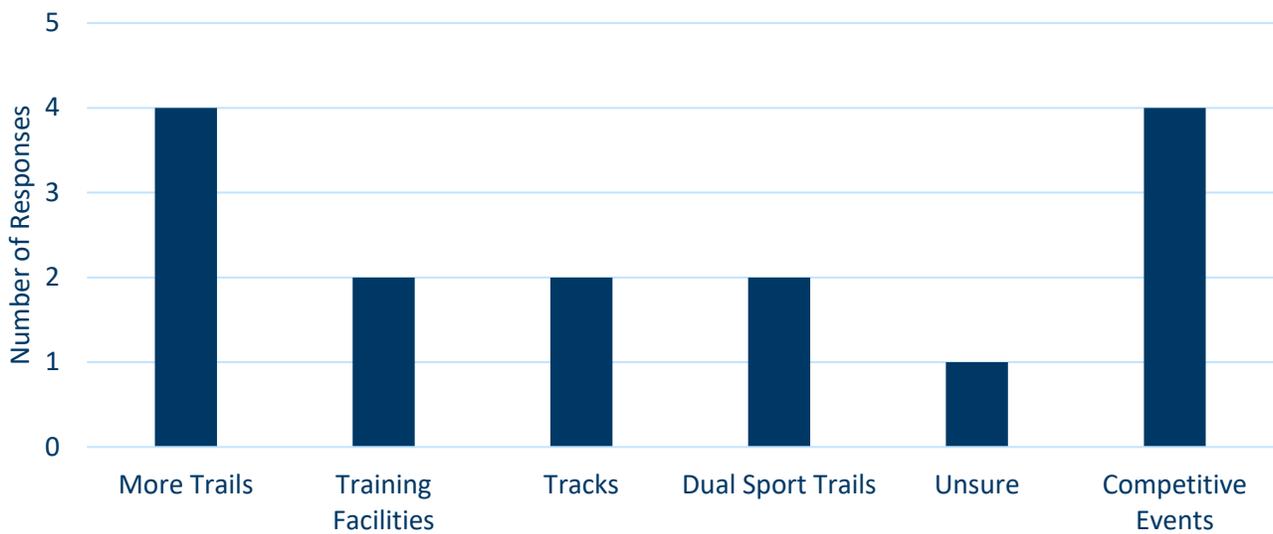
## Local Government Insight

The Local Government Questionnaire received 10 responses from a range of local government officials, including land commissioners, public works staff, city council members and forestry personnel. All respondents indicated familiarity with OHMs and OHM trails, and several noted that they are OHM riders themselves. Four respondents currently have GIA OHM trails in their area or are developing opportunities through the GIA Program. One additional respondent indicated that OHM riding opportunities exist in their area but are not enrolled in the GIA system. The remaining five respondents reported a lack of OHM opportunities that are either open or under development in their area.

Where OHM riding opportunities do exist, two respondents indicated the trails are located on state land, four cited other public lands (such as city- or county-owned land), two identified private riding areas and one reported OHM riding tracks at local fairgrounds.



Of the five respondents who already have OHM opportunities in their area, 100 percent indicated interest in developing additional OHM opportunities. Four expressed interest in additional trails, two in training facilities, two in riding tracks (which may include private property), two in dual-sport trails and one indicated uncertainty. Four of these respondents also indicated they would be open to allowing competitive OHM events to take place.



Of the five respondents who identified a lack of local OHM riding opportunities, 100 percent reported that they have never been approached by a club to sponsor an OHM trail through the GIA Program. Three of these respondents said they would be interested in working with a club to develop OHM trails and enroll them in the GIA system.