The City & Borough of Juneau (CBJ) and its consultant, USKH, Inc., asked the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC) to evaluate a proposed Off-Highway Recreational Vehicle (OHRV) site near Mile 35 Glacier Highway. Staff and consultants from NOHVCC Management Solutions (NMS) arrived in Juneau on June 16, 2013, and spent six days meeting with motorized users, various stakeholders, and land managers. Unusually warm, dry weather also allowed the team to spend a great deal of time on the ground evaluating the 35-Mile site, as well as other locations throughout the community. The NMS team consisted of Karen Umphress (NOHVCC staff), Ron Potter (NMS Consultant), and Dick Duford (NMS Consultant). The NOHVCC team was accompanied by staff from USKH, the City and Borough of Juneau, and Trail Mix, Inc. (a local nonprofit organization with extensive experience building trails in Southeast Alaska).
BACKGROUND

Wedged between steep mountains and the sea, the Juneau area has limited terrain for any type of land-based recreation activity. Many areas have been closed due to unmanaged off-highway vehicle (OHV) use and impacts. Today, Juneau has only 2.7 miles of trails where it is legal to ride an OHV. These dead-end trails historically provided access to natural resources, and are poorly suited for recreational OHV riding. We know from experience elsewhere that OHV use on dead-end roads leads to a proliferation of user-created trails at the road’s end, which usually damage natural resources. This is what is happening in Montana Creek.

Due to a lack of legal riding opportunities, some riders have sold their OHVs, while others have parked them. Some use the Alaska Marine Highway to access riding opportunities in Haines, and some riders travel to the Lower 48. Despite the lack of local options, however, interest on OHV recreation has not abated. In one afternoon, motocross enthusiast Josh Anderson was able to recruit 315 paying members for the Juneau Douglas Motocross Association (JDMXA). The riders are here; they just need a legal place to go.

At the stakeholder meeting held on June 19th, we heard that there is demand for one or more motocross tracks, including an advanced track and a “kiddie” track. Other OHV users include motorcycles, three- and four-wheel ATVs, and side-by-side “ROVs”. There is relatively little demand for full-size four-wheel-drive vehicles, such as Jeeps. Many riders said they enjoy jumping, “cutting cookies”, hill-climbing, mud-bogging, and popping wheelies – all of which are high-impact activities best accommodated in a managed play area. In general, we heard that people want a place to ride and play, but that there is relatively low demand for trails. We believe this is because most riders in Juneau have never experienced trails: Nearly all legal riding in Juneau and Haines is confined to old roads which provide little enjoyment to riders.

The first principle in successfully managing OHVs is to provide for the rider’s needs. A site generally can’t be all things to all people, but the more diverse opportunities we can provide, the stronger and more successful our management of OHVs will be.

Over the last decade, nearly 35 sites in and around Juneau have been considered and rejected for potential use by OHVs. In 2009, a proposal for a play area and trails in the Fish Creek area on North Douglas Island was rejected by the CBJ Planning Commission. We heard that the 35-Mile Site may be the last chance for OHV recreation opportunities in Juneau.

SITE VISIT OVERVIEW

**June 16 & 17**
The team toured the CBJ-owned parcel at Mile 35 Glacier Highway, hiking a 4.5-mile loop through the project area to get an overview of the site.

**June 18**
The team worked with agency staff to gather additional information, and reviewed detailed maps produced by USKH. The group toured a gravel pit owned by Goldbelt, Inc. located near Echo Cove,
and also observed OHV management issues and user-created campgrounds at Echo Cove itself. Impacts from OHVs were also seen at Montana Creek. The team also inspected the Peterson Lake Trail, which is reconstructed by Trail Mix. That work, and the attention to water management, is impressive. Later, the group had dinner with Josh Anderson, who represents motocross interests in the Juneau area.

**June 19**
On Wednesday, we gathered more site information and prepared presentations for a motorized stakeholder meeting that night. We had lunch with James Tipps, who is president of the Rough Riders ATV Club. That was followed by a meeting with Juneau Mayor Merrill Sanford. Thirteen motorized enthusiasts attended the rider stakeholder meeting, plus staff from CBJ and USKH. Considerable time was spent during that meeting fine-tuning the project’s vision statement, and brainstorming actions that would facilitate the operation, maintenance, and management of the park. The meeting’s positive, creative energy resulted in a lot of progress (see p. 3, “Vision & Management”).

**June 20**
Thursday the group prepared educational and site-specific presentations and data for the public meeting that night. This meeting was attended by more than 30 people, including Mayor Sanford and five Assembly members. Again, the meeting was positive and featured active group participation and good questions.

**June 21**
On Friday, the team toured CBJ-owned gravel pits in the Lemon Creek area and on Douglas Island. A final wrap-up meeting was held later with staff from CBJ and USKH.

**VISION AND MANAGEMENT**

The stakeholder meeting on Wednesday focused on creating a vision for the site, and facilitating the operation, maintenance, and management of the area. The draft vision statement is:

“To create managed, high-quality, family-oriented OHV recreation opportunities for motorcycles, ATVs, and ROVs in Juneau and the surrounding area. These opportunities would be day-use only and could include trails, play area, and one or more motocross tracks that are designed to serve riders of different ages and abilities. Facilities would lay lightly on the landscape and trails would be located and designed to insure sustainability while providing views and a variety of challenges.”

At some point a management plan needs to be developed for OHV recreation in Juneau. The group agreed that the following actions should be included in that plan:

1. Helmets would be required for all riders.
2. Safety training would be required for all riders.
3. Sound emissions would be limited to 96 db or less.
4. All trails will accommodate two-way traffic, except for the Learner’s Loop.
5. OHV use will be limited to designated routes and areas only.
6. A “trail pass” will be implemented to offset costs of operation and maintenance.
7. The management plan will address what events will be allowed, and describe how they will be conducted.
8. There will be no campground or overnight camping on site (an exception may be for events).
9. Options to hire a part-time law enforcement officer will be pursued.
10. Riders will donate labor, equipment, and materials as needed and available.
11. Trails and other facilities will be maintained by volunteers.
12. Facilities will be provided for an on-site caretaker/host, and funding will be pursued to provide a full- or part-time host.
13. A tower providing radio and/or cellular phone communication would be erected using donated materials and labor.

The 35-Mile site offers a variety of big timber, cliffs, open areas and views

**COMMENDATIONS**

When NMS reviews a site, considerable time is spent listening and observing. We have a very short time not only to understand the physical characteristics of the site, but also to learn the area’s politics, history, issues, use patterns, rider needs, and rider demographics. We also assess the OHV management concerns and issues affecting the surrounding area. We step back and look at the big picture: What is going on? What can be done to best address the OHV management issues?
We would like to thank the USKH staff, CBJ Parks and Recreation staff, CBJ Engineering staff, and Trail Mix staff who spent considerable time with us both in the office and in the field. We would not have been able to compile a complete picture of OHV recreation in the Juneau area without their valuable assistance. It is rare that we get such active participation and it reflects Juneau’s earnest desire to address OHV recreation and provide quality opportunities.

**OBSERVATIONS**

**Project Site:**

The 1,505-acre site is heavily forested with areas of muskeg, open water, and dense underbrush. Like nearly all areas in Juneau, the forest is very wet and presents significant constraints to development. Cliffs, rock outcroppings, and old-growth trees may complicate trail design, but they also add to the site’s visual character and will enhance the overall rider experience. For example, viewpoints along the top of the ridge are a reward for making the difficult climb.

Almost one-third of the parcel is located in the Cowee Creek Watershed and must be considered off limits to development at this time.

While a small portion of the site was logged several decades ago, it is unique because there are no roads, trails, or user-created impacts. From an OHV standpoint, it is a clean slate. This reduces the number of issues that need to be addressed during the planning process, and reduces project costs since there no rehabilitation required. We consider the site to be undeveloped.

The 35-Mile site would accommodate a parking area and a system of looped two-way trails.
offering a variety of difficulty levels. A preliminary USKH concept plan shows about nine miles of trail. We believe that could be expanded to include at least 12 to 13 miles of trails, but more work would be required to develop a more detailed trail concept plan.

The site could accommodate a motocross track. However, we feel that we would be forcing this use and impact onto the landscape, rather than harmonizing it with the landscape as a trail system would.

Similarly, a play area could be developed on the site, but doing so would be costly, and create a large, and unnecessary impact. Play areas are best provided by utilizing existing impacted sites like borrow areas, overburden or slash disposal areas, and quarries.

Ponds, muskegs, and peat bogs are sensitive areas that will need to be avoided.
Project Vicinity

Nearby is Echo Cove which has a CBJ parking lot and boat ramp and a dispersed camping area on Goldbelt property. Being on the beach, the site provides beautiful camping opportunities. This is a popular destination for OHV riders, but there is no legal place to ride except for the parking lot.

Many people ride on the beach at low tide, and even schedule group rides during to take advantage of the exposed intertidal area. Impacts from unmanaged OHV use are visible.

Goldbelt provides some security, but they have no law enforcement authority. Being at the “end of the road,” there is no cellular or radio communication, and no way to call for help without driving several miles.

It is not surprising that people are drawn to Echo Cove

Some riders have ventured outside of the designated area and are creating impacts
Immediately adjacent to Echo Cove, on the west side of Highway 7, is a former clearcut and gravel pit owned by Goldbelt. While closed to public access with a gate, this quarry is being used illegally by OHVs. The quarry site is much drier than the 35-Mile parcel, and also offers an existing network of roads and trails. A knob above the quarry delivers awesome 360-degree views, and dense second-growth forest would allow new trails to be built close to one another, yielding several miles of trails within an already impacted area. Overall, the Goldbelt gravel pit has the potential to be a high-quality play area.
Additional views from the Goldbelt quarry and gravel pit near Echo Cove.
Separating Echo Cove and the Goldbelt quarry from the 35-Mile project site is Cowee Creek, a high-value salmon stream. Also nearby is the U.S. Forest Service’s Heen Latinee Experimental Forest. Any trail connection between these two areas would have to be on the existing Highway 7 bridge. The bridge is on a long tangent, so sight distance is excellent, however the bike lane on the bridge is not wide enough to accommodate an ATV or ROV without encroaching in the traveled way.

**Juneau Area:**

The CBJ owns and operates gravel pits and rock quarries in the Lemon Creek area, one of which is located behind COSTCO and adjacent to Home Depot. This is an industrial area and the nearest residence is some distance away. This site would be well-suited for a safety training area.

On Douglas Island, the CBJ owns and operates another gravel pit on a 100-acre parcel off Fish Creek Road. This site is referred to as the Fish Creek quarry and it was rejected by the Juneau Planning Commission as an OHV park in 2009. We believe that the nearest residence is more than a quarter-mile away, and the quarry is about 1/3-mile west of Fish Creek Road. The pit floor is large and located
down in a hole. A drilling rig was actively working in the pit during our site visit, and we could not hear it until we were at the lip of the quarry. This quarry could be an excellent site for a motocross track. Over-sized boulders have been piled on one side of the quarry, which could provide outstanding obstacles for full size four-wheel-drive rock crawling, if a demand for that activity arises.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

As much as the riders and the City & Borough of Juneau want to move forward with development of an OHV riding area, we feel it may be an appropriate time to take a step back. After reviewing the 35-Mile site and getting a feel for the big picture, the demand for OHV recreation opportunities is multi-faceted; supplying opportunities to meet that demand could be multi-faceted as well. Some of these recommendations are politically and diplomatically complex. If the CBJ wants to proceed with these, time needs to be invested into carefully crafting a viable proposal or proposals. (This work could be done by CBJ, USKH, or consultants such as NMS.)

1. Utilize the proposed 35-Mile site for parking and develop as many trails with varied experiences and difficulty levels as possible. This will require a significant investment of time, resources, and funding.

2. Develop a plan with CBJ and Goldbelt to expand camping opportunities in the Echo Cove area, and possibly charge fees to cover operation and maintenance. The beach and the water appear to be a huge draw for Juneau residents. Echo Cove provides excellent beach access with a beautiful place to camp, yet there are OHV management issues there and a lack of viable enforcement. The “site host” suggested for the 35-Mile project could easily be based at Echo Cove, and be able to provide education and a management presence at both areas at the same time. This could be a win-win for the riders, CBJ, and Goldbelt.
3. Provide legal, managed access by OHVs to the Goldbelt quarry near Echo Cove. The riders at Echo Cove presently have no legal place to ride except the parking lot, and it is obvious that this arrangement is not working. The Goldbelt quarry on the east side of Highway 7 would offer direct access from Echo Cove, and is an outstanding opportunity to provide a high-quality play area with a small system of trails. Trails at the quarry would supplement the relatively limited trail system that could be built at the 35-Mile site, and construction costs at the quarry would be far less due to better drainage and the prevalence of gravelly material. The quarry’s topography, soil, and vegetation would also allow construction of a “Learner Loop”. Any trails built at the quarry site should be confined to the existing clear cut, and some engineering will be required to prevent access by OHVs to sensitive areas, such Davies Creek. While this scenario has clear riders, the CBJ, and Goldbelt, explaining these benefits will require a carefully developed proposal that is properly presented to the property owner.

4. A connection between the 35-Mile site, Echo Cove, and the Goldbelt Quarry is needed to offer a complete OHV package that provides trails, play area, views, camping, and beach access. Understanding human nature, we know that expecting people to load their OHVs on a trailer and drive a short distance to another site generally does not work. People will ride their OHVs on the state highway. Considering the high-value fish habitat found along Cowee Creek, the only logical connection for OHVs would be the existing highway bridge. A trail could be developed along the shoulder of the highway, and the only place where traffic and OHVs would mix would be on the Cowee Creek bridge itself. Making this type of use legal would require changes in state law, but the advantages of connecting all three of these sites together is huge from a rider experience and OHV management standpoint.

5. Develop a beginner and advanced motocross track in the existing Fish Creek quarry. Motocross is usually a short-duration activity where riders practice or race after school, after work, or between errands on weekends. Motocross is also a popular spectator sport, and motocross tracks are usually close to urban centers to allow quick access by participants and spectators. To reduce noise impacts, all activity would be limited to the quarry floor. There would be parking, a pit/staging area, and one or more port-a-potties. Most track development would be performed by volunteers, and no trails would be developed on this site.

In looking at the project file for the previous North Douglas OHV Park, it appears that a different approach in the project design, project planning, and public process could lead to improved project acceptance and approval. There is also a potential to bring in other stakeholder groups to increase the acceptance of OHV use on this site.

6. A training site is needed close to town, where it will be easy riders to access and receive beneficial training. It was exciting to hear the riders endorse the idea of mandatory safety training for all riders. This training is fun, helpful, and teaches rider ethics and environmental awareness as well as safe riding.
techniques. Options for such a training area include:

- Option A: The CBJ-owned Lemon Creek quarry near Home Depot would be very convenient and is the most suitable site for general OHV training. Class sizes are generally limited to eight or fewer, and the training lasts four to eight hours, depending on the group. The site would be used only when classes are scheduled and not as a neighborhood kiddie track. Corporate entities like the USFS, mining, and timber companies who use ATVs for work may be interested in receiving certification at this site also. The investment to develop this site would be minimal and would probably be done with contributed labor and equipment. A gate may be needed and one or more porta-potties for sanitation.

- Option B: Develop a Youth Training Areas (YTAs) at one or more of the identified sites. These are places where small children, some with training wheels, learn to ride and hone their skills. They are usually limited to children age 12 or younger, and limit engine displacement to not more than 125cc. Adult supervision is required, but adults are not allowed to ride on the course. Most YTAs include a Tot Lot consisting of a small oval (for little kids with training wheels), a larger oval and/or figure eight track, and a variety of logs or rocks to practice skills. The areas usually include mounds of dirt at different heights for climbing. Nationwide, YTAs are very popular since they provide a safe environment to learn how to ride – not a city street or the Echo Cove parking lot. While they are designed for OHVs, YTAs can also be used by kids with bicycles or mountain bikes (use by other users requires careful scheduling to avoid conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users. Picnic tables or sheltered bleachers are sometimes provided so parents can comfortably watch their kids play and learn.

- Option C: Develop a safety training area and YTA as part of the Fish Creek proposal.
7. Expanding our analysis to additional areas and sites may increase the scope of the project, however it may decrease overall costs by leveraging more opportunities. Placing a motocross track at the 35-Mile site would require considerable excavation and fill for the base of the track, while the same type of use at the Fish Creek quarry require virtually no site improvements. Similarly, significant cost savings could be achieved if modest improvements were made to formalize existing use at Echo Cove, rather than constructing new facilities at the 35-Mile site.

CONCLUSION

Again, we appreciated the time, assistance, and positive energy of the CBJ, USKH, and Trail Mix personnel. They were all very helpful, professional, and good humored. Please feel free to contact us about questions or clarification of any aspect of this report.

We hope that NOHVCC Management Solutions can help guide CBJ towards successful implementation of a project or projects that will in the end benefit the riders, CBJ, and the natural resources.
Parents look on as a professional rider instructs a group of kids during a Family Fun Day event in a YTA in British Columbia