

Benton Board of County Commissioners
PO Box 190
Prosser, WA 99350

May 20, 2014

Dear County Commissioner:

As individuals and organizations dedicated to reducing deaths and injuries caused by All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), we urge you to oppose efforts to allow recreational riding of ATVs on Benton County roads.

We understand that the Board of County Commissioners has scheduled hearings to provide a forum to discuss whether or not ATVs should be allowed on county roads with speed limits of 35 mph or less. An expansion of ATV access to roads is contrary to public safety and puts the operator and others at risk of severe injury or death.

ATVs should not be driven on public roads because driving ATVs on public roads is more dangerous than operating them off-road, ATVs are not designed for roadway use, and ATV manufacturers have policy statements strongly urging consumers not to operate their vehicles on public roads.

ATV roadway crashes account for over 60% of deaths and over 30% of serious injuries. Roadway crashes are more likely to involve multiple fatalities, carrying passengers, collisions and head injuries. Victims in roadway crashes were less likely to be wearing protective gear such as helmets and were more likely to be carrying passengers.

Most importantly, ATVs are not designed to operate on paved or public roads. An ATV's narrow wheelbase and high clearance are designed for riding in pastures, fields and wooded areas. The high center of gravity increases the risk of rollovers, particularly at roadway speeds. In addition, ATV's knobby, low-pressure tires allow for operation on a variety of surfaces, but they do not grip roadway surfaces well (paved or unpaved). As tire-surface interaction deteriorates with increasing speed, the operator can lose control of the vehicle, endangering not only the ATV rider but also occupants of other vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists. In addition, many ATVs lack a rear differential which can compound on-road handling challenges. The lack of a rear differential results in the wheels on both the inside and outside of a turn rotating at the same speed even though the wheels on the outside of the turn cover more distance. This design problem is mitigated on off-road surfaces like dirt and grass but makes the machine much more difficult to control on-road.

The Specialty Vehicle Institute of America (SVIA), a not-for-profit association representing ATV manufacturers and dealers, has a strong policy statement against the use of ATVs on public roads. A training manual for ATV riders from the ATV Safety Institute, a division of SVIA, states:

Remember, ATVs are intended for off-road use only. Never operate an ATV on public roads, and always avoid paved surfaces. ATVs are not designed for use on public roads and other motorists may not see you. ATVs are not designed to be used on paved surfaces because pavement may seriously affect handling and control.”¹

Further, the SVIA makes clear that:

ATVs are designed, manufactured and sold for off-road use only. On-road vehicles must be manufactured and certified to comply with U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS). These safety standards consist of extensive and detailed compliance requirements. Since ATVs are not intended to be used on-road, they are not designed, equipped or tested to meet such standards.²

This statement shows that the manufactures of these vehicles, those who know the vehicles better than anyone, are clear that they should not be operated on public roads. In addition, the mandatory rules for ATVs require that all ATVs have a label indicating that ATVs should not be operated on paved roads or on public roads.

Consumer Federation of America (<http://www.consumerfed.org/pdfs/ATVs-on-roadways-03-2014.pdf>) and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (<http://www.iihs.org/frontend/iihs/documents/masterfiledocs.ashx?id=2056>) recently released reports documenting the dangerous trends associated with ATV operation on public roads.

We urge you to oppose expanding ATV use to public roads in Benton County because it places the public, including ATV operators, pedestrians, bicyclists, and all motor vehicle drivers and their passengers at unnecessary risk.

We hope that you will consider these comments as you hold hearings on whether to expand ATV access in Benton County. If we could be of further assistance, please feel free to contact Michael Best at Consumer Federation of America at mbest@consumerfed.org or (202) 939-1009.

Sincerely,

¹ Available on the web at http://www.atvsafety.org/InfoSheets/ATV_Riding_Tips.pdf on page 7.

² Specialty Vehicle Institute of America, “Position in Opposition to On-Road Operation of ATVs,” available on the web at <http://wisdotresearch.wi.gov/wp-content/uploads/tsratvlaws1.pdf>.

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