

ALBERTA OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE ASSOCIATION

STARTING A CLUB

INTRODUCTION

Why should I start an Off-Highway Vehicle club?

The sport is experiencing unprecedented enthusiasm and growth. OHV clubs are an integral part of this sport — and with good reason. From fun to safety, the combined efforts of many OHV users can accomplish far more than one individual can. A club can provide more fun, safer and with less effort and less cost.

Most active clubs specialize in community-level activities and link their resources with those of other clubs in their province through an association of provincial OHV riders such as the Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association.

ORGANIZING A CLUB

If no club exists in your immediate area, don't be discouraged. Many of the most dynamic OHV clubs have been started by a handful of enthusiasts who decided that a few hours of their time were well worth the benefits to be derived from club membership. If you know of ten or more enthusiasts in your area not belonging to another, potentially competitive club, the chances are good that the necessary ingredients for an active club are present. A common love of the sport is likely to be more than adequate cement for this group to bond.

If you feel the opportunity exists, here are some of the steps we recommend:

1. Talk to your friends who are active riders. Form a working committee of three or four enthusiastic individuals to plan the initial meeting and to divide the necessary work during the early stages of the club. Regular and frequent work sessions should be planned.
2. Visit your local OHV dealers. They are very likely to provide assistance of many kinds, from "technical" advice to meeting space.
3. Compile a list of OHV owners in your area. Local dealers may be able to assist you through their records.
4. Establish contact with local newspapers and television and radio stations. Alert them to your plans.

INITIAL ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

At this point, you are ready to plan your first meeting to guide the creation of a local club. It's important that most arrangements be made far enough in advance, preferably one month. This should include securing a meeting room. Take the following steps:

- Select a meeting date with great care. Obtain a community calendar, and check with major local organizations to discover serious conflicts with other community events. Ultimately, the date should be chosen approximately three weeks in advance.
- Once the date of the meeting is selected, rapid action becomes essential. Printed announcements should be mailed to all known OHV owners in your files.
- Notify the news media by letter and in person. Arrange interviews if possible. Photographs are also desirable devices used to increase community interest.
- Arrange to be placed on any community activity calendars and place notices at strategic locations in your community such as gas stations, OHV dealers and other high-visibility public places.
- Arrange to call all known OHV owners approximately four days prior to the scheduled meeting.
- Discuss the purposes of your prospective club. Prepare a handout for the meeting listing these purposes. Among those you may wish to consider are:
 1. To promote greater interest in OHV use
 2. To promote the development of OHV trails, campsites and other facilities;
 3. To promote the use of OHV's as family sports vehicles;
 4. To promote properly organized OHV trips, rallies and competitions;
 5. To promote friendliness and good fellowship among OHV owners.
 6. To cooperate with police, fire, and Civil Defense officials, and other community organizations by providing OHV's for emergency duty;
 7. To promote the healthful benefits of OHV riding as a recreational activity.
 8. To promote responsible use of the environment.
- Be sure to have attendance sheets filled out at the meeting.
- Plan to designate five committee chairpersons at the meeting. These individuals should be selected prior to the session from among those showing the most interest in forming a club. The five committees suggested are:
 1. **Organizational Committee** – to develop bylaws and to plan for initial meetings;
 2. **Objectives Committee** - to recommend specific goals, policies, and purposes;
 3. **Nominating Committee** – to select a slate of directors at the first formal meeting of the club.

4. **Membership Committee** – to maintain the membership files, send out notices of meetings, and plan a membership drive at the first meeting;
5. **Publicity Committee** - to work with all other committees and publicize their efforts and to select a recommended name for the club to be presented at the first official meeting.

The membership of these committees should be left open to volunteers at the initial organizational meeting. Your club will be much more successful if virtually all members are allowed and encouraged to participate in its initial design and subsequent operation.

- The working committees should select a temporary presiding officer. He or she must be enthusiastic about the club and forceful enough to lead the organizational meeting, while at the same time being fair-minded and responsive to the audience. The single most important characteristic of an effective chairperson is adequate preparation. The working committee and those designated to serve as committee chairperson should meet with the temporary presiding officer several days prior to the actual meeting to review all issues in detail, and plan a date for the second meeting.

Finally, the temporary presiding officer should prepare an agenda for the meeting in consultation with the members of the working committee.

CLUB ACTIVITIES

Remember that clubs can and should be politically active locally. This represents just a start, however, for overall effectiveness can be markedly improved by joint efforts with other clubs through provincial associations and federations. Just as a club can provide a political voice more powerful than that of any of its individual members, a provincial OHV association can increase the effectiveness of its constituent clubs. Moreover, by banding together, clubs can work to achieve a uniform governmental role in trail development, as well as other positive steps by the province to encourage safe and enjoyable OHV use.

Finally, provincial federations are excellent conduits for the exchange of ideas. Equipped with good ideas and enthusiastic members, any ATV club is assured of organizational success and many pleasant experiences for its membership.

BACKGROUND MATERIAL

This section is intended to provide additional, in depth information for use by club organizers and members of specialized committees during the early portion of the club's development. It contains committee assignments and supportive materials for the organizational committee, objectives committee, nominating committee, membership committee and publicity committee.

Organizational Committee

The primary objective of the Organizational Committee is to formulate a workable set of bylaws for your club. Among other items, this committee must examine such issues as:

- Advantages/disadvantages of formal incorporation of the club. Incorporation as a non-profit society is generally recommended. A valuable resource available on-line is the Alberta Government document entitled 'How to Incorporate a Society' it is available at http://www3.gov.ab.ca/gs/information/clctc/incorporating_societies.cfm
- Types of memberships and amount of annual dues, in conjunction with the membership committee;
- Advantages/disadvantages of a Board of Directors;
- Frequency of meetings, and election procedures.

The Objectives Committee

The Objectives Committee will play an important role in determining both the types and the intensity of club activities. The mandates of this committee are:

- To identify major problems facing local OHV users and potential means to lessen pressures;
- To examine the role of the club in the local community and define its commitment to community activities, and
- To conduct an ambitious survey of prospective members to detect common interests.

It is suggested that, following the development of recommended priority objectives, the committee also prepares a listing of secondary objectives. Each of these lists should be fluid, and ideas voiced at later meetings should be incorporated to the desires of the club.

The Nominating Committee

The exact character of the slate of individuals to be presented by the Nominating Committee will vary according to the organizational scheme selected by your club. The criteria for selection of candidates remain the same. To be successful, the club officers need to blend leadership with empathy. Local OHV clubs cannot lose sight that they are by and for their members.

The Nominating Committee must also be conscious of the advantages of a well-rounded group of officers. These individuals should be representative of the OHV users in your area to

the fullest possible extent. Occasionally, in the past, clubs have been overly “cliquish,” and have found this route invariably counter-productive. Such steps limit the attractiveness of club membership and thus decrease its potential.

Finally, while it is important to attract well-known community figures into the club, and even place them in leadership roles, it is mandatory that those nominated by the committee have sufficient time and interest to serve the club. If the club leadership fails to be energetic and industrious, regular club members hardly can be expected to remain enthusiastic.

The Membership Committee

The power of a club is not some mystical quality, but is rather the collective talents and ambitions of its members. Therefore, each club must devote significant energies to attracting and sustaining memberships.

During the initial stages of your club, this drive for members assumes extraordinary importance. A “critical mass” must be reached to sustain the club.

The secret to attracting members is simple; each prospective member must be convinced that they will derive sufficient benefits to outweigh his devotion of time and finances. A skillful strategy must be developed, stressing the positive attributes of club membership.

The Publicity Committee

Clubs require a “voice” to inform the surrounding community about their activities. Both the general good of the club and the success of individual programs are often linked to area residents outside the club as well as the members themselves. Thus, the Publicity Committee must serve as one of the club’s most active segments, on a continuing basis.

The Publicity Committee must cultivate contacts with local media representatives: radio, television, and press. Over time, the committee members will better understand the particular interests of these people, and your dealings with the media will grow more productive. However, follow these simple rules at all times:

- Take advantage of community calendars and similar public services offered by the media for both regular and social events.
- If your club is planning an unusual activity, mail a “news release” to the local news media approximately one week prior to the scheduled date. Be sure to include the name of your club and the time and place of the event. Be concise! Include photographs whenever possible.
- A good, amateur photographer can be one of this committee’s most valuable members.
- Provide the name, address, and telephone number of a knowledgeable member who can act as a spokesperson for your club in every mailing to local news media.

A Suggested Code of Ethics:

1. I will be a good sportsperson. I recognize that many people will judge all OHV owners by my actions. I will use my influence with other OHV owners to promote responsible conduct.
2. I will maintain clean trails and use areas. I will work to safeguard clean and pure streams and lakes. I will ensure my OHV use has the lowest possible impact on the environment. I will safeguard living trees, shrubs, and other natural features.
3. I will respect other people's property and rights.
4. I will lend a helping hand when I see someone in distress.
5. I will make my vehicle and myself available to assist in emergency situations.
6. I will recognize the rights of other user groups.
7. I will energetically strive to bring other recreation participants to recognize and respect my rights as an OHV user by explaining my needs and, at the same time, listening to their needs.
8. I will learn and obey all federal, provincial, and municipal rules regulating the operation of OHV's in areas where I use my vehicle. I will inform public officials, as required, when using public lands.
9. I will not harass wildlife, and will become aware of protected or sensitive areas.
10. I will use marked trails, and areas open to OHV's. I will not travel where prohibited.