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**Testimony Submitted to the House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee
on Public Lands**

**“EXPLORE America250: Enhancing Accessibility at our National Parks and Public
Lands.”**

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On behalf of the Motorcycle Industry Council (MIC), Specialty Vehicle Institute of America (SVIA), and Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association (ROHVA) – together referenced as the Associations, I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony supporting the implementation of the accessibility provisions of the EXPLORE Act.

The EXPLORE Act is landmark legislation that among other things directs increased opportunities for accessible access to federal public lands.

Simply providing off-highway vehicle (OHV) trail opportunities on public lands creates accessible recreation. OHVs allow for many with diverse limitations to access trails, views, experiences, and the unique camaraderie that can only come from being outdoors with friends and family. The Associations’ Senior Vice President, Government Relations, Scott Schloegel, described how the utility of OHVs got him into our sport, “When I was 3 years old, my father contracted polio, resulting in near full loss of the muscles in his legs, relegating him to using a walker, crutches, and power scooter for the remainder of his life. My dad couldn’t go out and play soccer, football, or basketball with us boys, but he could pull his leg over the seat of a snowmobile, ATC, or quad, which became our outdoor time together. We spent a ton of time hunting, fishing, and cutting wood that was used for heating our home and building a large addition to the house.” Without OHV access, the childhood activities for Scott and his family would have been significantly limited.

Other examples of using OHVs for accessibility occur when State and local off-highway vehicle clubs and associations host veterans’ rides across the country. One such example is the annual Thank You for Your Service ride hosted by the Iowa OHV Association. The first such event, held in 2018, “...consisted of thirty members from Iowa’s off-highway vehicle (OHV) clubs (who) trailered their multi-passenger recreational off-highway vehicles (commonly referred to as “side-by-sides”) to the Iowa Veterans Home to give 100 veterans and staff members a ride on the grounds of the 150-acre facility.” Veteran’s Home staff were thrilled with the ride. “I was very excited to be part of this event. I’ve never seen so

many happy residents,” said Matt McAllister, Recreational Therapist.” And “I have had many staff and residents express how great the opportunity was for the residents and how smoothly it went. There were a few residents who just were not sure of riding, but once they went, they wanted to go again,” said Emily Hall, Recreation Bureau Chief.

OHVs can offer an opportunity for those with disabilities to not only engage in outdoor recreation but also tap into our sport in a way that may not be available through other means. Dan Kleen, who was the catalyst for the Thank You for Your Service rides in Iowa, is an incomplete C-6 quadriplegic. Dan shared that he doesn’t take rides for granted, instead he views them as a gift he has been given as there was a time that he didn’t believe he would be able to get outdoors ever again. He recounted a story that is special to him. “I was at a Jamboree and participants were offered the chance to ride a new model ATV that was being premiered at the event. I left my wheelchair in my truck and set out on the ride with a group of riders and industry representatives that I didn’t know. When we stopped for lunch, I rode my ATV up to the picnic table and ate alongside the other riders. After eight hours of riding, we returned to the trailhead and a friend brought my chair over so I could dismount. The other riders were stunned as they hadn’t realized that I had any limitations. That was a pretty fun day for me as I was able to keep up with all the riders and I felt 100% engaged in the sport.”

The reality is that few people with physical limitations have large swaths of private property to ride on. Allowing for the responsible use of OHVs on trails on public lands will increase opportunities for physically challenged individuals to get outdoors and enjoy OUR public lands. Implementation of the EXPLORE Act should focus in part on improving those opportunities with appropriate infrastructure. Those who use wheelchairs will benefit from parking areas with hard-packed ground, for example. Loose gravel can be difficult and tiring to navigate. Land managers should consider providing paved paths to accommodate wheelchairs to facilities and to move throughout the trailhead and charging infrastructure for charging wheelchairs and electric OHVs which are often used by individuals with noise sensitivity issues. Campsites should include accessible sites that provide accommodation like raised tent sites that allow for an easier transition from a wheelchair than is possible from chair to ground. Fire rings can be shorter in height with longer handles to access grills and include outer rings that keep feet away from the hot surface on the inner ring. RV campsites can include accommodation as well. Concrete or paved pads provide improved accessibility to those with disabilities.

The Gypsum City OHV Park located on the southeast corner of Fort Dodge, IA created an example that can be replicated by federal land managers. See photos below.

This picture shows appropriate parking for those in wheelchairs and paved access to the pavilion. Note the parking spaces are long enough to accommodate a trailer.



Taken from the other side, this photo shows more accessible parking and paved access to facilities.



This photo shows a concrete pad that has been placed in an RV camping area as well as an accessible picnic table (the overhanging tabletop on the left side is designed for use by someone in a wheelchair) and fire ring.



The industry itself has stepped up to make sure our veterans and others with disabilities can get outdoors and recreate. Indian Motorcycle and Veterans Charity Ride partner to celebrate June as Veteran Motorcycle Therapy Month which includes several motorcycle rides throughout the month and hosts rides throughout the year. Can-Am and the Road Warrior Foundation (RWF) host an annual epic “Adventure Therapy” ride for military Veterans that covers more than 1,000 miles aboard the Can-Am Spyder.

One of many examples of industry sponsored organizations and events that get veterans outdoors on off-highway vehicles is the Warfighter Made Mission. This organization, sponsored by Polaris, and Fox among others provides, “...Recreational Therapy to service members, veterans, and their families with a fleet of Polaris RZR’s for enjoyment on a private off-road course. Several vehicles are adapted for those with catastrophic injuries. These events improve quality of life, mental health, and bring families together in a fun and positive environment.”

In short, OHVs and other powersports products provide opportunities to those with disabilities to get outdoors, spend time with family and friends, and create lasting

memories. Increasing and improving these opportunities should be prioritized and the Associations support EXPLORE Act provisions to that end.