Opportunities for responsible, public-based motorized recreation gets a financial boost from a DNR grant program.

Trail Riders

Story By Kathy Andrews
Photos By Dave Sellman

With a required helmet and additional protective gear, this rider takes advantage of a forested trail at one of the DNR grant-assisted OHV parks.

There is a definite adrenaline rush as men, women and youth strap on helmets, fire up their off-highway vehicle (OHV) engines and take to trails winding through hilly woodlands, through deep ravines and across expansive grasslands.

Admittedly, OHVs raise concerns. Although useful for property owners checking their land and hunters retrieving large game or accessing remote areas, when OHV riders venture onto private lands, state parks and federal wilderness areas, trespass and liability concerns are raised, and conflicts may occur with those park visitors seeking a peaceful break from their busy schedule.

All types of trails and terrain, from beginner to expert, can be found at the public OHV sites funded through DNR's grant program.

Thanks to a Department of Natural Resources (DNR) grant program established in 1999, eight public OHV areas provide hundreds of acres of riding trails dedicated solely for these users.

"The OHV grant program was established under the Recreational Trails of Illinois Act to provide financial aid to government agencies, not-for-profit organizations and other eligible groups or individuals to develop, operate, maintain and acquire land for off-highway vehicle parks and trails," explained Dave Sellman, senior grant administrator with DNR.

A commitment to opening the facility to the public is a requirement of receiving grant funds.

And, to the credit of the riders, this is a 100-percent user-funded program.

"A portion of the state all-terrain vehicle and off-road motorcycle title fee goes into the OHV fund," said Mitch Ingold, DNR's representative on the five-person OHV Advisory Board. "In addition, an annual decal must be purchased for each vehicle used on sites receiving the grant funds, with this money funneled directly back to support acquisition and development of new sites, and for educational purposes."

Since its inception, 27 projects—totaling more than $3.2 million—have been awarded. Nearly $1.7 million has gone toward acquisition of property for OHV

Applications for OHV grant assistance must be received by DNR no later than noon March 1 of each calendar year. Awards are generally announced within 180 days following the application deadline date. Examples of eligible project activities include:

- cost of land acquisition from willing sellers for OHV trails and scramble areas;
- construction, rehabilitation, maintenance and design for OHV trails/routes and scramble areas;
- restoration of areas damaged by OHV usage;
- rider education and safety programs;
- cost of facility security.

Grant assistance from this program cannot be used for land acquisition through eminent domain, or construction of OHV trails and areas on DNR-owned and managed lands, or U.S. Forest Service lands designated as wilderness or currently not authorized for such use by an approved management plan.

Additional information on the OHV grant program, OHV decal purchase requirements and contact information for sites open to the public, can be found at www.dnr.state.il.us/ocd/newohv2.htm.

For information regarding issuance of replacement decals, where to buy decals and an update on what states have reciprocal agreements, contact the DNR at (217) 782-2965.

The OHV grant program helps to provide legal places to ride for both ATV and off-road motorcycle enthusiasts.

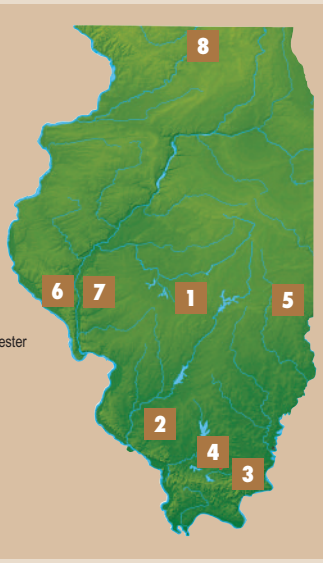
sites, with an additional $1.5 million allocated for site development. Financial support has also been awarded for educational purposes—workshops addressing potential neighbor concerns, safety training for staff and riders, and advertisement of the program. The enabling legislation also allows for use of program funds to help restore areas damaged by unauthorized OHV use.

Sellman explained the primary criteria the board is looking for in selecting projects for funding: "Of utmost concern to the board are safety, sound facility management and proof of fiscal responsibility." The OHV grant program can provide up to 100-percent funding reimbursement assistance for approved, eligible project costs.

"A grant program which allows the purchase of special areas for OHV use allows these enthusiasts a place where they can pursue their activity without coming into conflict with those who want to enjoy quieter activities, and it provides better protection for birds and wildlife in our state parks and natural areas," said Marilyn Campbell, who recently retired from the position as executive director of the Illinois Audubon Society. "It also is good that funds can be used to repair damage done by those who act irresponsibly and ride where such activities are prohibited."

According to Lance Martin, a member of the Little Egypt Public OHV Area (Williamson County) and OHV advisory board chairman, the commitment of grant recipients and club members is second to none.

"The owners, club members and staff at the Illinois facilities are to be commended for their dedication to providing safe riding facilities for visitors," Martin concluded. "While they spend hours on upkeep of the area—mowing, patrolling property borders, caring for the site campground, organizing special events and grooming trails—they are committed to providing quality experiences and helping to improve the public perception of the OHV rider."

Sites Awarded OHV Grant Funds

1. **Christian County**
   South Fork Dirt Riders, Taylorville
   (217) 237-4752
   www.southforkdirtriders.com
2. **Perry County**
   Coyote ATV Trail Riders, Coulterville
   (618) 758-2851
3. **Saline County**
   Williams Hill Pass OHV Park, Harrisburg
   (618) 252-3978
   www.williamshillpass.com
4. **Williamson County**
   Little Egypt Public OHV Area, Harrisburg
   (618) 252-2062
   www.leormc.com
5. **Clark County**
   Clark County Park District, Marshall
   (217) 889-3601
   www.clarkcountyparkdistrict.com
6. **Pike County**
   Rockport Off-Road Park, Rockport
   (217) 437-5337
   www.rorp.com
7. **Scott County**
   Crooked Creek OHV Riding Area, Winchester
   (217) 742-3415
   www.crookedcreek4.com
8. **Winnebago County**
   Rocky Glen OHV Park, Loves Park
   (815) 654-5257
   www.rockyglenohv.com