

Off-Road Driving

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Whether you call it 4-wheeling or muddin', or just a drive on the beach, it's important to know when, where, and how you can drive off-road.

Just a few key tips will make for a safe, fun day in the park and help ensure that you, other visitors, plants and animals, and the park's environment and history remain safe from harm.

What is an off-road vehicle?

They are called many things—swamp buggy, air boat, sand rail, dune buggy, ATV—or they can be an everyday truck with some modifications. For the purposes of this brochure, vehicles capable of driving off-road are referred to as ORVs (off-road vehicles).

Technically speaking, any motor vehicle that is “designed for or capable of cross-country travel on or immediately over land, water, sand, snow, ice, marsh, swampland, or other natural terrain” is considered an ORV.

(Executive Order 11644)

Where can I drive an ORV?

The National Park Service cares for nearly 400 national parks, and it preserves these irreplaceable treasures in a way that retains their scenery, environment, and history, and makes Americans proud.

When considering whether to allow ORV driving, the National Park Service looks at things like the reasons for a park's creation, how it will affect or disturb plant and wild-life habitat, and whether it will damage soil and water or degrade the park's nature, beauty, or scenery.

Off-road driving is prohibited in most parks. Where off-road driving is allowed, the National Park Service regulates it. Each park has its own rules, so be sure to check before you go. Information about equipment, routes, permits, and other essentials is available at the park visitor center, from a national park ranger, or on the park's web site at www.nps.gov.

ORV checklist: Know before you go

- ✓ **Permit:** I have a permit and have paid the fee, where required.
- ✓ **Location:** I know the designated access points, routes, and areas for the park.
- ✓ **Equipment:** I have packed the required equipment and my proof of insurance.
- ✓ **Safety:** I am ready for a safety and equipment check by a ranger.
- ✓ **Rules:** I know the rules for the park and the federal and state traffic rules that apply to ORV driving.
- ✓ **Courtesy:** I will drive in a way that respects other visitors and their experience.



Both of these vehicles at Big Cypress National Preserve, Florida, are considered ORVs. The vehicle on the left is operating legally on the designated trail; the vehicle on the right is not.



National park rangers perform vehicle safety checks and enforce off-road driving regulations. Cape Cod National Seashore, Massachusetts.



Only drive in legal ORV areas unless lots of shoveling and paying a fine are on your list of “things to do.” Off-road driving is illegal at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, Michigan.

Wrong Turns

Illegal driving causes ugly, lasting damage



This female loggerhead turtle, listed as a threatened species, was attempting to make a nest when it was hit and dragged by an ORV operating illegally. ORV use in protected areas could reduce or eliminate the local population of threatened and endangered species. Cape Hatteras National Seashore, North Carolina.



Don't get in over your head. Fluids leaked from ORVs poison fish and other animals that rely on rivers and streams. Ozark National Scenic Riverways, Missouri.



Driving around barricades and in areas closed to ORVs causes erosion, which kills plants and destroys beach dunes. San Juan Island National Historical Park, Washington.

Personal liability and penalties for illegal ORV use

Under federal law, anyone who causes injury to or destroys National Park Service property or natural or cultural resources can be held personally liable for the cost to investigate and assess the damage, to restore the property or resources, and to compensate the American people.

- Operating an ORV off park roads or outside designated areas is a violation of Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations, and is subject to a maximum fine of \$5,000 and up to six months in prison.
- Violations related to wildlife, plants, and natural or cultural features, carry a maximum penalty of \$5,000 and/or six months in prison.
- Endangered Species Act violations can result in fines of up to \$50,000, one year in prison, and civil penalties up to \$25,000.
- Damage to or destruction of archaeological resources in violation of the Archaeological Resources Protection Act carry a maximum penalty of \$20,000 and two years in prison.



Tundra and other delicate lands with sensitive plants and fragile water systems are easily damaged and can take years or even decades to recover. Denali National Park and Preserve, Alaska.

Help protect your park

If you see what appears to be ORV misuse or damage due to ORVs, please report it to a national park ranger, park headquarters, or to the nearest ranger station or visitor center.