

Hinsdale County/Town of Lake City

2022 OHV Program Report

Hinsdale County and the Town of Lake City applied for and were granted a three-year Special Use Permit from CDOT in March, 2021, that would allow Off-Highway Vehicles (OHVs) to travel on a 2.26 mile stretch of SH 149 through the Town. This permit was the second granted by CDOT to allow this use of Hwy 149, the first being a two-year permit that was granted in 2019.

Discussion between the county, town and CDOT regarding a program to allow OHVs on Hwy 149 came about after a state program in 2016 highlighted 16 trails in the state with gaps or missing segments. The Alpine Loop Scenic Byway, which loops from Lake City through the San Juan Mountains, was highlighted as one of these trails.

The Alpine Loop is made up of two Hinsdale County roads – CR 20 and 30 – that start and end in Lake City and are open to use by OHVs. The Loop connects to a number of high-altitude roads, including access to roads into Silverton and Ouray. The Alpine Loop is a popular summer tourist destination that benefits the Town of Lake City as well as the other high-mountain towns.

The Alpine Loop was identified in the 16 in 16 program because traveling the entirety of the Loop requires using SH 149, making it impossible for OHV riders to “complete” the loop. After considerable study by Hinsdale County, Town of Lake City and CDOT, it was determined there were no optional routes that would allow OHV riders to travel the entire Alpine Loop.

The idea of a “pilot program” was created that would provide a special use permit to Hinsdale County and the Town of Lake City to allow OHVs to travel on the stretch of SH 149 from CR 20 to CR 30. The permit allows OHVs on the highway from Memorial Day until September 30 and required special signage on the highway, lowering speed highway speed limits along the highway route, increased education to inform OHV riders of the program, season counts of OHVs on the highway and the ability of the public to provide feedback on the program via the Hinsdale County website.

Following the seasonal end of the OHV program, Hinsdale County holds a meeting with program partners to receive comments on the outcome of the summer. Participants include Hinsdale County, Town of Lake City, Hinsdale County Sheriff, Colorado State Patrol, CDOT and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. A report is then generated with partner comments and the overall success of the season.

Partners participating in the 2022 after season meeting and providing comments included Hinsdale County Administrator Sandy Hines, Hinsdale County Sheriff Chris Kambish, Colorado Parks and Wildlife Officer Lucas Martin, CDOT Traffic and Safety Program Manager Zane Znamenacek, Colorado State Patrol Captain James Saunders and Colorado State Patrol Major Brett Williams.

Captain Saunders and Major Williams both reported CSP had no contacts involving OHVs on Hwy 149 during the 2022 program period of Memorial Day until September 30. Saunders commented “we are ok with the way things are.”

Znamenacek said that CDOT received no concerns regarding the OHV program in 2022. He also commented that other communities have inquired if they could receive a special use permit from CDOT for a similar type of program and have been told this is not a possibility. "CDOT is still working with Hinsdale County and Lake City but not opening this type of program to any other communities. This is a unique situation. We spent a lot of time looking at every other alternative we could possibly use to connect the loop and there really isn't any other viable option," he said.

Sheriff Chris Kambish commented that OHVs on Hwy 149 continue to be no more of an issue than any other type of vehicle, adding "generally speaking the number of contacts is the same with other motor vehicles." Kambish said there was nothing egregious and no accidents in town or on the paved portion of the highway and that speeding is not an issue. "The biggest safety concern is under age drivers operating OHVs, and most contacts are for equipment issues, things like drivers not understanding seat belts and eye protection," he said.

OHV Contact statistics provided by Sheriff Kambish:

- The included statistics account for all OHV contacts in the Town of Lake City and in Hinsdale County, regardless of location. The Sheriff's Office is unable to separate statistics to include only those occurring within the boundaries of the pilot program.
 - Hinsdale County
 - Contacts: 47
 - Citations: 15
 - Warnings: 30
 - Accidents: 5 (**These accidents took place on county roads, NOT on Highway 149.**)
 - Town of Lake City
 - Contacts: 44
 - Citations: 12
 - Warnings: 20
 - Accidents: 0
- During the same time period, there were 228 total contacts for all motor vehicles in the County, and 281 in the Town.

Lucas Martin with CPW said he continues to write citations to OHVS, with almost all involving OHVs traveling on Hwy 149 outside the boundaries of the approved route both north and south. "I have had people come out of Gunnison County on the state highway travelling 20, 25 or 30 miles," Martin said, adding he has written approximately the same amount of tickets on the highway as in previous years. Martin also commented that one of the signs at the end of CR 30 specifying OHVs are allowed on the Hwy between Memorial Day and September 30 needs to have mile markers added or have the sign removed entirely. "It creates confusion and it creates wiggle room to argue that they can go outside the confines of the pilot area."

Sandy Hines commented that in 2022 Hinsdale County began the process of adopting a new model traffic code as well as updating the county's OHV ordinance, both of which provided increased OHV fines. In addition, the updated OHV ordinance provided law enforcement the ability to ticket OHVs when operating in locations where they were not permitted. Hines said that the county administration office received very few comments regarding the OHV program in 2022 and that overall the program went smoothly. Two complaints were made about OHVs on the highway outside of the program route, and one additional comment was made regarding signage at CR 30.

Hines added that the county provides information regarding the OHV program to the public through the county's website and social media. Information is also available in person at the Lake City Visitors' Center, on the visitors' website, www.lakecity.com, in the printed Lake City Visitors' Guide and on Lake City's social media pages.

One concern that was discussed among the group was the lack of identifiers on OHVs. Sheriff Kambish commented that currently there is no way to tell one OHV from another, which puts law enforcement at a disadvantage. "From behind, all these OHVs look the same. If something happened and we needed to follow up with a particular OHV, there is no way to do it. There is no way to identify these vehicles. This should be considered in the future," Kambish said. Major Williams said the state would be resistant to any kind of license plates on OHVs because the state has re-written statutes specifically outlawing OHVs on state highways. Lucas Martin said pressure from other partners on the CPW could possibly bring about a change in the Title 33 laws that could provide for a sticker or some other kind of identifier for an OHV.

Alpine Outdoor Association set up a booth twice a month on the corner of Hwy 149 and 2nd Street and counted vehicles on the highway. The counts for OHVs on the highway during that time are attached. In addition, the group gave out printed OHV information and talked one-on-one with visitors and gave out information and answered questions.

This group of partners will meet again in spring 2023 to discuss the signage concerns that were discussed. The county will work with Zane Znamenacek on new or corrected signage as needed.

As 2023 is the last year for the current Special Use Permit, the county and town will discuss whether or not an application for a new permit will be considered. This process will take place starting in the summer of 2023 and will involve public input.

Hinsdale County/Town of Lake City OHV Program
OHV counts on Hwy 149 2021 - 2022

2021			2022		
	Date	OHVs		Date	OHVs
	15-Jun	87		14-Jun	186
	22-Jun	108		21-Jun	188
	29-Jun	102		28-Jun	386
	6-Jul	267		5-Jul	247
	13-Jul	232		12-Jul	0 (no count)
	20-Jul	354		19-Jul	237
	27-Jul	455		26-Jul	291
	3-Aug	355		2-Aug	405
	10-Aug	342		9-Aug	237
	17-Jul	265		16-Aug	163
	24-Aug	212		23-Aug	239
	31-Aug	151		30-Aug	288
	7-Sep	130		6-Sep	252
	14-Sep	188		13-Sep	219
Total		3248		20-Sep	230
					3568