JUNE 2014

AMERICAN MOTORCYCLIST

Trail Ambassadors Give Back So You Can Ride More

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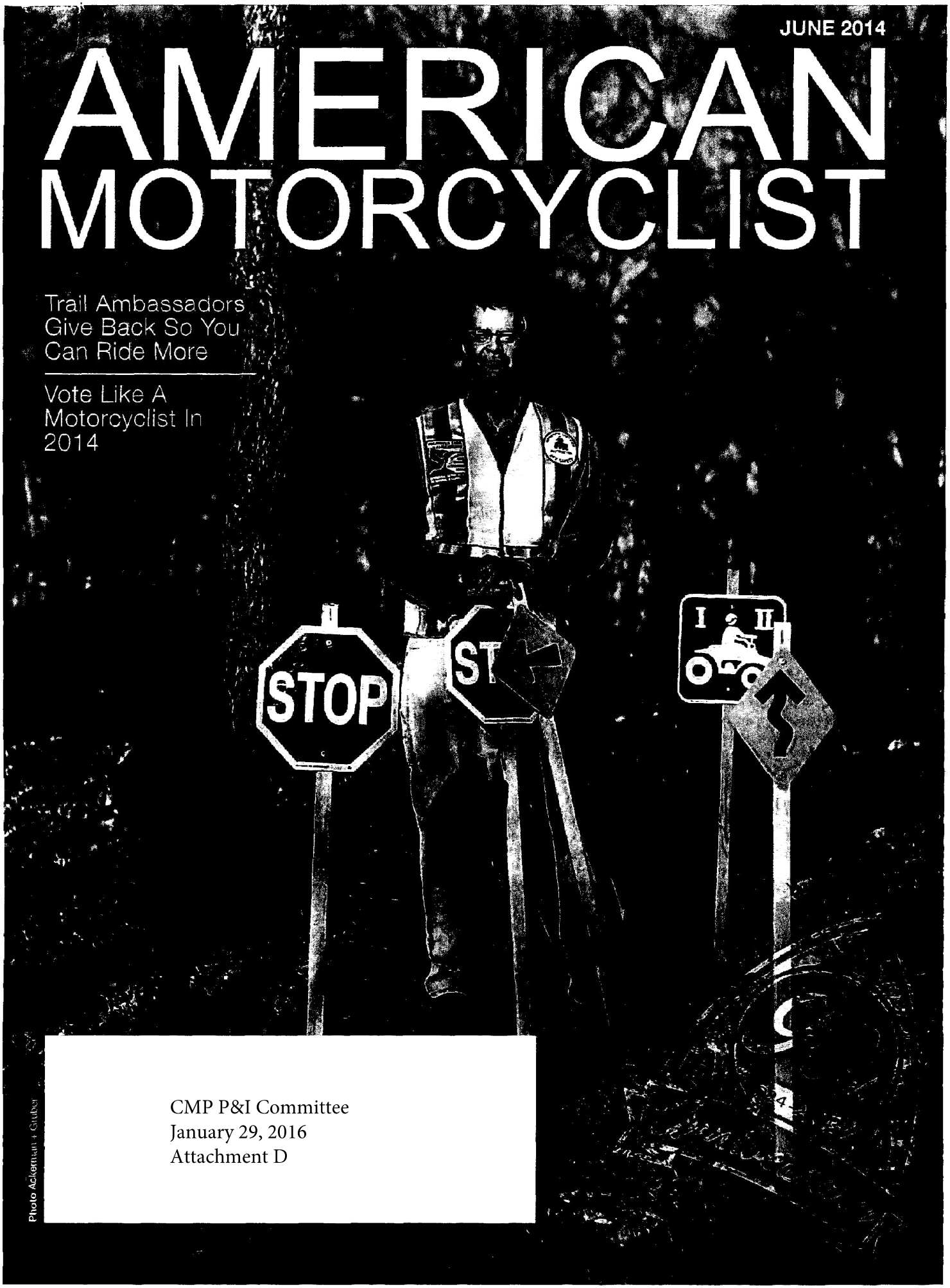

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CMP P&I Committee
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Attachment D

SUBMITTED BY STEVE SALISBURY
CMP P+I COMMITTEE MEETING JAN 29, 2016

GOOD FACE FORWARD

Trail Ambassadors Offer Guidance, Advice To Fellow Riders

By Jim Witters

Longtime off-road enthusiasts Jim E. Schoon and David Halsey are miles apart geographically, but united in spirit for a cause—promoting responsible riding, keeping trails open for public use and polishing the image of the off-road rider.

The men are two of the hundreds of volunteers in the Trail Ambassadors program operating in four states: Arizona, Minnesota, New Mexico and Wisconsin.

Trail ambassadors monitor riding areas, offer assistance to other riders, spot and report hazards, and alert law enforcement to riders who are operating illegally or unsafely.

But the volunteers get something out it, too.

Schoon is an AMA competition member from Tucson, Ariz., and races in events organized by the Arizona Motorcycle Riders Association. The clubs in the AMRA run AMA-sanctioned events in his state. Schoon has been a volunteer trail ambassador for about a year.

"Our local dirt bike club, Trail Riders of Southern Arizona, was looking for a way to have a positive influence with land managers, and the Trail Ambassador program looked like a way to demonstrate positive community responsibility through documenting volunteer efforts," Schoon says.

Halsey is an All-Terrain Vehicle member of the AMA and president of the 360-member Woodtick Wheelers ATV/OHM (Off-Highway Motorcycle) Club in northern Minnesota. He has been a trail ambassador, or TA, for more than four years.

"As many TAs will tell you, being out there monitoring the trails and assisting riders is a great way to help promote responsible ATV riding and protect our state's trail system and its funding. It's fun visiting with families on the trails, and it gets you out riding on new trail systems," Halsey says.

How It Works

The ambassador programs are funded by state departments of natural resources, through direct grants to off-highway-vehicle clubs, reimbursement of expenses to clubs and individuals or, as in Wisconsin, through a contract with a non-profit corporation.

In all states, participants must be proficient riders with a thorough knowledge of the patrolled area. Volunteers must provide their own vehicles.

In some states, participants must be certified ATV instructors.

Participants receive training, identifying vests or patches, and communications devices before being assigned certain trails to patrol. Ambassadors also receive reimbursement for expenses, such as gas and oil, meals and, if necessary, lodging. Some clubs have been reimbursed for equipment, such as computers and projectors used for training.

Trail ambassadors are not law enforcement officers, but they work with rangers and other authorities to help ensure the trails are safe.

For example, participants are trained to handle situations in which riders leave designated trails or ride without mandated protective gear. They are provided strategies for managing these situations and others, such as when an ATV rider is carrying a passenger on an ATV not designed for passengers.

Volunteers may approach riders operating illegally or unsafely and offer advice or hand out brochures outlining the laws and regulations. But ambassadors cannot issue citations. They can, however, report the improper behavior to law enforcement authorities.

In the same way, ambassadors who spot a hazard—such as a washout or a felled tree—are instructed to photograph it and report it. The program discourages them from trying to repair or remove a major hazard.

L-R: Jim Schoon, Doug Seitz, Jeff Prince, of the Arizona trail ambassadors program.

Negative Publicity Prompts Action

Tom Umphress, chair of the Safety Advisory Committee of the Trail Ambassador program in Minnesota, says negative media attention in the mid-2000s prompted state legislators to try to shut down OHV activities.

"There was not enough (law) enforcement. But we didn't want a police state out there, either," Umphress says.

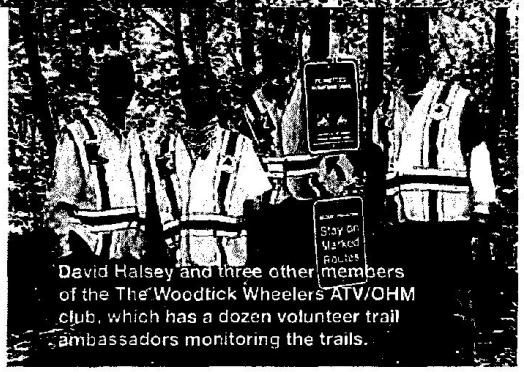
So the people who used the trails decided to show lawmakers they were responsible citizens, whose image was tarnished by the poor choices of a few.

"Riders with a stake in the game could hand out rules and maps, and just provide a presence," Umphress says. "Wearing high-viz vests and ambassador patches, the ambassadors could deter some of the bad behavior without intervening."

State, Rider Cooperation

Jeff Prince, OHV program coordinator for Arizona State Parks, says the role of

A father and daughter are offered directions by a Minnesota trail ambassador while riding on the Martineau OHM Trail in the Paul Bunyan State Forest.



David Halsey and three other members of the The Woodtick Wheelers ATV/OHM club, which has a dozen volunteer trail ambassadors monitoring the trails.

the state agency provides stability and direction.

"The OHV program at Arizona State Parks developed a pilot program using Recreational Trails Program funding to establish a volunteer program especially suited to the motorized public and land managers' mutual needs on a statewide basis," he says. "All of the land managing agencies in Arizona were brought on initially as partners to help develop the program.

"Since the program was staffed and funded by a state agency, the partners had a reasonable expectation that the program would last," Prince says. "This gave the program a strong foundation from which to build. Centralized record keeping, support from our public information office, and other agency support help keep the wheels turning and promote the idea of motorized trail users being great stewards of the land."

AMA Charter Life Member Doug Seitz was in the first ambassador-training class in Arizona and says the 7-year-old program benefits everyone.

"My interest is in single-track motorcycle riding," he says. "I saw the ambassador program as a way to promote off-highway motorcycle usage and to have input with the agencies that shape policies in that area."

Gary Eddy, ATV/snowmobile administrator at the Wisconsin DNR's Bureau of Law Enforcement, says his agency "simply wouldn't have the personnel to closely manage the trail patrol program" without the volunteer ambassadors.

Wisconsin awarded a grant to the National Off-Highway Vehicle Insurance & Services Group Inc., to manage the state's ambassadors program. NOHVIS was the only applicant for the grant.

"The success of the program is directly related to the NOHVIS group's high level of organization, frequent communication with the department regarding the program and dedication to supporting positive, safe and ethical off-road recreation," Eddy says.

The fledgling ambassador program in New Mexico—begun in September 2013—emerged after state official David Chester learned about the concept at an annual conference of the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council.

"Ambassador programs are just one way for OHV enthusiasts to become involved, but they are important," says Christopher E. Johnson, an AMA Life Member and the OHV education coordinator for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. "Government agencies, such as ours, must account for every penny spent.

A Quick Look At Trail Ambassador Funding

Minnesota's highly successful program provides a snapshot of membership, funding and spending.

On average, in a given year Minnesota volunteer trail ambassadors...

clock **4,524 hours** monitoring trails

cover **12,242 miles** monitoring trails

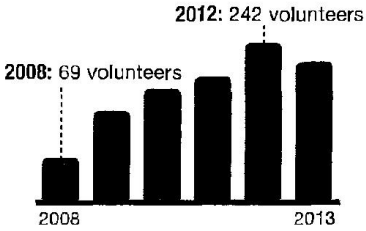
make **2,587 verbal contacts** with trail users

hand out **788 informational resources**

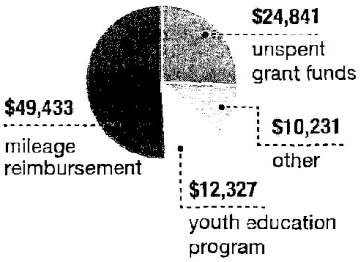
In 2012, ambassadors reported...

- 39 signs that were damaged, missing or needed
- 125 youth without helmets
- 43 youth with passengers
- 28 instances of off-trail riding
- 202 hazards (trees, washouts, others)
- 6 trail changes

The number of active trained ambassadors has increased during the last six years:



Grant expenditures for 2012:
$96,832



Five-year total spending:
$439,505

Source: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Volunteers, such as our trail ambassadors, extend the value and power of those pennies—which come from OHV registrations, not general tax revenue—to keep motorized recreation safe and expand our opportunity to enjoy it."

Obstacles Overcome

One of the obstacles to creating and sustaining such a volunteer effort is one that should be expected: opposition from anti-OHV groups.

Umphress encountered those forces in Minnesota.

"The anti-access groups opposed the program," he says. "They were invited to participate in the advisory committee and some were appointed to the committee by the DNR, but they stopped coming after two meetings.

"They wanted to get paid by our accounts to go out and see 'all the damage that the OHVs had done.'"

Another, less-expected obstacle is the very nature of OHV riders and clubs.

Prince says limitations in Arizona state government funding to oversee volunteer programs sent officials in search of partnerships in the community.

"Unfortunately, this was limited, due to the time and effort required to establish such partnerships and the cost to organizations in time and money to make it happen," Prince says. "Compounding this problem is the tendency for motorized groups to organize themselves around clubs in a different way than, say, a friend's group or environmental group that is focused on delivering services to agency partners to further their organizational goals.

"Don't get me wrong, clubs do excellent volunteer work, but with each working autonomously, they typically fail to get good press for their stewardship compared to their non-motorized counterparts."

In New Mexico, the biggest obstacle has been the vast expanses of unpopulated land that make the state so attractive to OHV trail riders.

Says Johnson: "OHV enthusiasts in New Mexico are gifted with amazing land to explore. But the vast open spaces also provide a major obstacle. Our population is pretty small—barely 2 million statewide, and our towns and cities are far apart.

Minnesota's David Halsey makes an entry in the log book as John Dickerman ties a ribbon to a downed tree that is blocking the trail.

"So, we depend on local riders with local knowledge, but finding those riders who have the time and inclination to participate is a challenge."

While the New Mexico program remains nascent, Johnson says the state has learned one lesson worth passing along.

"My best advice is to reach out to the enthusiast community," he says. "The best motorcycle, ATV, snowmobile, and ORV (off-road vehicle) operators are exactly the folks who are already practicing and promoting the culture of responsible and safe use that we want to spread."

Tap Existing Volunteers

Johnson's advice can make recruiting OHV riders and clubs for a trail ambassador program easier. Some clubs already were performing many ambassador functions before a formal structure was put in place, so getting them to join the program was easy.

Halsey was a DNR-trained ATV safety instructor before becoming a trail ambassador, and he was heavily involved with volunteer work through his Woodtick Wheelers club.

Ron Schubert, a volunteer ambassador and a member of the New Mexico OHV advisory board, concurs: "I am an outdoor enthusiast and believe in giving back.

"I have been volunteering with the United States Forest Service for over seven years now, through the New Mexico Off Highway Vehicle Alliance and friends that I ride ATVs with."

Schoon's assessment: "I thought it would be like a necessary evil to be endured, or a way to be 'used' to do grunt work the state Parks or Forest Service didn't want to pay for. Wrong. Just do what you were doing anyway, and use the program to help form relationships with like-minded people who just happen to be using a pickup truck to maintain trails rather than a dirt bike."

Positive Impact Seen

Trail ambassador programs are more than feel-good exercises. Tangible, lasting benefits are being realized.

"The Trail Ambassador program creates a positive image of OHV riders among state legislators and the general public, building support for responsible motorized recreation on public lands," Halsey says.

Schoon says the benefits are sometimes unexpected.

"I joined for selfish reasons, and I am already seeing positive returns," Schoon says. "I wanted governmental land mangers to know that the dirt bike community could be an asset to trail creation and maintenance, and that is already happening with recent U.S. Forest Service managers.

"Participation in the ambassador program, and what ambassadors do, is shown to those managers, and it puts some meat on the bone in demonstrating off-roaders can be used to make land management more effective."

In addition to winning land-manager acceptance, the ambassador program has helped the off-road riders and clubs in Arizona.

"Good citizenship is contagious," Schoon says. "Other riders benefit by seeing that it pays to take an active role in helping manage our trails, and complaining about closures gets us nowhere. It has led to a positive attitude in our club that something is being done to keep access to the lands. And we can still have all the fun we want and be responsible users at the same time."

Positive Peer Pressure

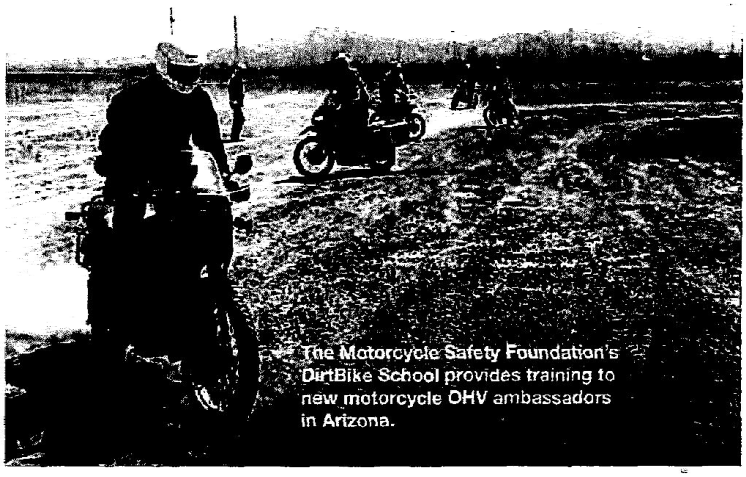
Acknowledging that the poor behavior of a few can influence some riders to break the rules, Umphress says the trail ambassadors generally exert a positive influence. And that influence has a cumulative effect.

Photos New Mexico: Christopher Johnson; Minnesota: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources; Arizona: Jeff Prince

Trail Ambassador Program Participant Requirements

What It Takes To Tackle The Trails

The requirements for becoming a trail ambassador differ from state to state. Here is some information from the active programs.



The Motorcycle Safety Foundation's DirtBike School provides training to new motorcycle OHV ambassadors in Arizona.

ARIZONA

Off-highway vehicle ambassadors receive extensive training from professional training representatives and serve as a point of contact for other OHV users to obtain helpful and timely information about the trails they ride.

Anyone who has off-highway vehicle experience and is able to provide an off-highway vehicle that is licensed and street legal can volunteer as an OHV ambassador, provided the volunteer is willing to abide by the OHV Ambassador Code of Conduct. OHV ambassador volunteers are recruited and selected without regard to race, creed, religion, age, sex, color, national origin or disability.

For more information, check here: www.azstateparks.com/ohv/ambassadors.html.

MINNESOTA

Individuals interested in volunteering for the Trail Ambassador program must meet these requirements:

- Be 18 years or older;
- Be an active certified Minnesota Department of Natural Resources volunteer youth ATV safety training instructor;
- Submit to a thorough background investigation;
- Possess a valid driver's license;
- Complete the DNR ATV Safety Training CD;
- Be sponsored by a qualified organization; and
- Complete a "Trail Ambassador" training session.

For more information, check here: www.dnr.state.mn.us/safety/vehicle/ta/index.html.

NEW MEXICO

Those who wish to volunteer for the Trail Ambassador program must meet the following requirements:

- Be at least 18 years old;
- Possess a valid driver's license;
- Be able to operate an OHV responsibly and safely;
- Be an experienced rider who is able to navigate roads and trails of varying difficulty and length;
- Own a properly maintained and equipped OHV suitable for roads and trails;
- Complete and keep current all required ambassador training;
- Be able to walk over uneven terrain;
- Be able to lift at least 30 pounds;
- Wear personal protective equipment as required by the land management agencies, including DOT approved helmets on all ATVs, motorcycles, and ROVs; and
- Agree not to carry firearms while participating in OHV Trail Ambassador patrols or events.

More information is available here: www.wildlife.state.nm.us/ohv/ohv.html.

WISCONSIN

The Wisconsin Ride Smart Trail Patrol Ambassador Program participants must be ATV instructors certified by the state Department of Natural Resources to become full ambassadors.

Members of the Trail Patrol Ambassadors Auxiliary do not need instructor certification.

Volunteers are trained by the nonprofit NOHVIS organization according to DNR standards to help ATVers riding on the trail. NOHVIS contracts with the state to operate the ambassadors program through grants.

For more information, check here: www.trailpatrol.com/index.php/program-information.

"We have riders taking on the sustainability of the trails system we use," Umphress says. "We gave ourselves a bad name through irresponsible riding. So, let's self-police.

"You don't need a formal program. You need an established rider base. There are states that are doing trail patrols that are not state sanctioned. When people see an authority figure, they tend to behave."

Colorado is a state that had a trail ambassador program, but lost funding for it after 2012. Yet the volunteers continue to work with state officials.

Justin Lilly, an adviser and former program director for Colorado's Stay The Trail Ambassadors program, says, "Our initial STTA program scored low on grant funding, so we've brought it under the Stay The Trail Colorado umbrella for the stewardship coordination."

One key is to understand that every rider is an ambassador for OHV recreation, Lilly says.

"It may take two seconds to rip past a hiker disrespectfully, but it will likely take years, if ever, to change that person's resulting perception, even when face-to-face with responsible users from there on out," he says. "So proper trail etiquette, responsible use, and promotion of that to the general public in both idea and practice are crucial for all of us as 'ambassadors.' "

He says, "Some of the best champions I know of are folks who are simply presented with a nugget of information or an opportunity to act and are enabled to enact the change they then desire to see."

Umphress explained his approach by identifying four groups they try to address:

- Those who don't know the rules;
- Those who pretend they don't know the rules;
- Those who believe the rules are dumb;
- Those who are true rebels.

"The first group, we try to educate. Once the education is in place, the second group can't pretend ignorance any more," Umphress says. "Those two groups can help convince the third group that there are good reasons for the rules and for abiding by them. And, eventually, peer pressure can bring the true rebels into line, because the rebels won't seem as cool to their friends.

"We are not managing OHVs. We are managing people."