



Imperial Valley Press

May 13, 2008

Report: OHVs are major pollutant

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Off-road vehicles are a major cause of California's air pollution, according to a report released last week by the Center for Biological Diversity.

The Center for Biological Diversity claims off-road vehicle use in this state releases as much greenhouse gas as burning 500,000 barrels of oil each year.

"Off-road vehicles contribute more with more pollution," Chris Kassar of the center said. "As time goes on, the emissions from off-road vehicles will continue to increase."

And Kassar said that has an adverse effect on Imperial County.

"Off-roading is definitely popular there and it has a concentrated usage down there (in Imperial County)," she said. "And it just happens to overlap with an area where air quality is pretty poor."

Though Kassar, nor the report, said specifically what the effects are of off-highway vehicle usage, the study does state "off-road vehicles are a leading contributor to the region's poor air quality."

Brad Poirez, Imperial County Air Pollution Control District officer, said he has not reviewed the report issued by the center but will in coming days.



A crowd of people encompass the area of the races.
IMPERIAL VALLEY PRESS FILE PHOTO

He said the APCD does not monitor air quality in the dunes area as that is the responsibility of the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Border Patrol.

"Because we don't have monitors out there, we can't correlate OHV use to our exceedance of our monitors," he said.

Imperial County Supervisor Wally Leimgruber, a proponent of off-highway vehicle usage, and Cathy Kennerson, chief financial officer for United Desert Gateway, an organization that promotes OHV usage in conjunction with the BLM, agreed the report issued was that of a singular agency with an agenda against OHV recreation.

"When you have an opponent that's doing the research you need to consider the source," Kennerson said. "Studies can be done and parameters can be put into it."

"And that organization has wanted to close the (Imperial County) Sand Dunes down for a long time," she said.

Kennerson said it is estimated Imperial County receives as much as \$300 million yearly during dunes season, which typically runs from late September through March, from those using OHV areas.

Leimgruber said the report is part of an effort by the Center for Biological Diversity to "cripple OHV use in the

desert Southwest” that will be fought by local agencies.

Kassar said part of the center’s goal is not to cut out OHV use, but the goal is merely to cut down off-road vehicle emissions.

However, Leimgruber said the center has continually tried to narrow OHV areas in Imperial County.

“For some reason there’s a group of people that want to stop this economic development locally here in Imperial County,” Leimgruber said. “And they’ve come out with studies in the past trying to close down more desert area.”

Leimgruber said one key to the OHV area’s air-quality issues lie with its geographical location, as it

is a corridor for adverse weather and high winds.

Still, he said he will wait until a meeting between Poirez and a technical review team to further address the center’s report.

“My goal as a supervisor is to make Imperial County an OHV-friendly area,” he said.